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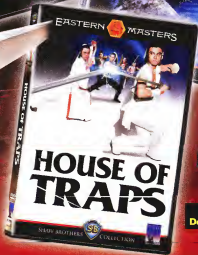
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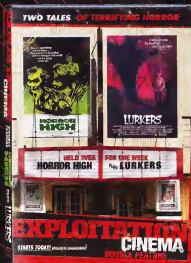
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Brazil's notorious boogeymen, Coffin Joe, plays from the ashes with the long-awaited third entry in the trilogy that began with one of the most outrageous films to ever come out of South America — or anywhere. Featuring an interview with Coffin Joe himself, José Mojica Marins, and screenwriter Denilson Romão. **PLUS:** The Essential José Mojica Marins bibliography, by SCOTT GIBBEY, JONAWAKA YUKOYIO, PHILIP ZELARI and KIRI-LA JANISSE

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Note From Underground

There are few horror icons more unique than Coffin Joe – murderer, rapist, blasphemer, heretic, gravedigger, corpse defiler, misogynist, sadist and all around existential villain. He's Brazil's national Boogeyman: a top hat-adorned, caped undertaker invented and played by an even wilder filmmaker named José Mojica Marins. In a way, he's that country's Alejandro Jodorowsky (who also appeared in his own films), an eccentric cult genius whose work lies on the fringes of horror cinema, and whose challenging and unconventional films have languished in obscurity until recent years.

Even the hardest of horror fans, myself included, knew very little about the guy until a handful of his movies were released on video in North America in the 1990s. That's because much of his work was created during the '60s in Brazil, where he is known as *Zé Do Caixão* (pronounced Zee du Caa-shoo). At that time, Brazil was a deeply religious and conservative nation run by a military dictatorship that absolutely hated everything Marins made. The authorities made sure to censor nearly everything he shot, so it makes sense that his films are somewhat of a mystery to North America, even though he would eventually become a multimedia personality in his homeland.

Much like Alice Cooper, it's sometimes difficult to tell the difference between Marins and Coffin Joe, as the director/actor has, over the years, effectively become the character he invented. He often wears his beard long, dresses in black, and only recently cut his alarmingly long, ghostly fingernails (which he did for charity at a *Sepultura* concert). Of course, Marins is his own man, one who's created a truly original and lasting horror icon. Unlike the intellectually anorexic North American genre superstars such as Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees (or even *Evil Dead*'s Ash), Coffin Joe has something to say. Theology, ethics, morality and sin are the order of the day in a typical Coffin Joe movie. He's a malevolent heretic with some serious pagan leanings who preaches fatalism, individualism and rejection of both God and Satan.

His films (beginning with *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*, the first horror movie ever made in Brazil) begin over with anti-religious rhetoric as he tramples around like a Brazilian Jack the Ripper in his quest to locate the perfect bride to bear him a son who will be immortal and one day rule the world (in Coffin Joe's belief system, reproduction is the only way to achieve immortality).

Naturally, Coffin Joe's zany antics caused outrage and shock in his native country. At the same time, people's love for him ultimately turned him into a household name. Before long, parents were invoking the name of Coffin Joe in disquieting tales and threats in order to scare their children straight. A chain of retailers even began employing the title of his film in a publicity campaign: "At Midnight I Will Take Your Best Offer and Sell You a Brand New Volkswagen!"

Granted, Coffin Joe's brand of culturally significant fear works best in a pro-Catholic, conservative setting, to North Americans, he can come across as a little goofy, especially given his overly philosophical leanings. But I think what's so universally compelling about the character is how well-realized he is. Marins has given so much depth to his fount of inspiration, which extends well beyond existential nihilism as the root of Coffin Joe's murderous psychology.

Having spent the better part of his childhood in a movie theatre his father managed, it is hardly surprising to learn that Marins' largest influences for the character of Coffin Joe come from the Universal classics. In fact, he has said that he worships Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi and channelled them into his own villain. The look of those old monster movies also had a huge impact on Marins' style. *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* and its sequel *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse* are shot in expressionistic black and white, save for a colour sequence in which Coffin Joe goes to hell.

Like any other monster kid, Marins also spent a great deal of time reading comic books, he even wrote a series of them as an adult. EC Comics, specifically *Tales from the Crypt*, ended up playing a huge role in the development of Coffin Joe as a screen villain. The spark of that series can be seen quite clearly in *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*, which is introduced by a haggard old gypsy, grasping a skull, warning the audience not to watch the movie. It's a special movie for many reasons, but chiefly because Marins gave philosophical weight to those old cartoons from EC and explored them in an environment all his own.

It's been over 40 years since Coffin Joe first terrorized Brazilian filmgoers, but with the final installment in the trilogy that began with *Midnight* currently doing the festival circuit, Marins (now 72) is here to prove that, despite the best efforts of the Church and a Brazilian military dictatorship, you just can't keep a good boogeyman down.

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ILLUSTRATION BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

I AM 60-YEARS-OLD and I am writing to thank you for your last issue featuring Forrest J Ackerman. I know you may be monitoring Fory's failing health, and as of a few hours ago Fory's home is in hospice mode. I've been a Monster Kid since *FM* #2 and, like Fory, I've never grown up. My wife buys *Rue Morgue* every month for me and last week she had a big smile on her face because of Gogos' painting of Fory on the cover. I can't imagine a more fitting farewell gift to Fory than your last issue, Jovanka. I received a DVD about him last Thursday and you have a spot in it where you talk about Fory, *FM*, *Rue Morgue* and your tattoos. I finally got to see a few of them. I don't know how you turn out such a quality magazine every month with articles covering every aspect of a horror fan's interests. I think my 27-year-old daughter comes to visit us just to read my latest *Rue Morgue*. Anyway, your love letter to Fory came at the right time. I'm looking at the cover now with a heavy heart knowing what's to come.

Jerry Armellino — address withheld

YOUR COVER STORY on the great Forrest J Ackerman was amazing! Anyone who's ever been lucky enough to meet Uncle Fory knows what an honestly generous and kind man he is. I was one of those sickly kids who was stuck in bed with only issues of *Famous Monsters* to keep me company. I literally read them until they fell apart in my hands. So to finally meet him years later as an adult was better than meeting any rock star or sports giant. He even put my picture in one of the later issues of *FM*. So to see the love and respect *Rue Morgue* put into that issue is just another reason to proclaim myself a devoted fan of your magazine. I know it meant a lot to Fory's fans and friends.

Dan Jacobs — Columbia, South Carolina

WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN, I used to walk about three miles from my home in the Raleigh, North Carolina 'burbs to the newsstand at North Hills mall in hopes that when I got there I'd find the current issue of any War-

ren title. When James Warren folded his empire in 1983, it was the permanent end of my childhood (never mind that I was 27). The thrill of discovering something cool at the magazine rack was gone. I'd thought the feeling was completely lost until I found issue #83 of *Rue Morgue*, in a Walden Books mag rack of all places. The Gogos cover of our beloved Uncle Fory, and the brightly coloured left margin blurbs jumped out to greet me like a long-lost friend. When examining the contents I can't help but believe that if 4-E had been left uninterrupted as *Famous Monsters* editor, the magazine would've evolved into something like *Rue Morgue*. Unlike your competitors' gore journals, you guys have found a way to please the Masterboomers and post-Romero splatterkids alike. Thanks for giving me a new reason to haunt the magazine racks.

Fred Kane — address withheld

I LOVED THE ARTICLES about Fory in the October issue. I wish, however, that it had included more information on Fory's lesbian-themed literature and his involvement with the Daughters of Bilitis, an early lesbian/women's rights group. A while back *Rue Morgue* did a great article about gay/lesbian literature and is, I feel, ahead of the rest in covering LGBT issues in horror, as well as women's issues in horror. A woman's perspective (especially as an editor) is greatly appreciated and important to have, especially on controversial topics (for example, your editorial on rape/revenge flicks). Let's face it, some horror fans (especially older ones) can be rather intolerant, while the overwhelming majority are greatly open-minded. It's inspiring to see one of the genre's oldest proponents having a history in progressive politics (especially in the '50s).

Matthew Scott Simon
— somewhere in Kansas

LIKE MANY who grew up in the generation of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, I was very pleased to read your articles on *FM* and Forrest J Ackerman. My neighbourhood

friends spent many an enjoyable hour reading, learning and laughing with these classic magazines. I have one question, however. You were able to reproduce several Warren *Vampirella* covers in the Classic Cut article in the back of the October 2008 issue, but your Note From Underground column indicated that former publisher Jim Warren would not allow you to reprint any of the *Famous Monsters* covers at the risk of a lawsuit. That is a shame, but I was curious if the difference in the *Vampirella* reproductions was because Harris Publications now owns rights to all *Vampirella* issues, or is there another reason?

Paul S. Brittain —
Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania

It was only specified that we do not reproduce FM covers — Ed

I JUST WANTED to thank you for a fantastic Halloween issue of *Rue Morgue*. Great cover, one of the coolest I've seen. I was especially taken with the article entitled "Shock Waves" by Richard Gavin, with illustrations by Justin Erickson. It's great that the magazine decided to do an article on the subject of old-time radio. I love many of these shows and listen to them frequently on my local NPR station. Also, the Gore-Met did outstanding work on his article "The Gore-Met's 50 Essential Gore Films." I didn't realize just how much I'm into gore films! I own or have seen several of the films on the list over the years. The list makes me want to explore more of the wonders of gore. Aside from the points I've mentioned, *RHM* is the very best Halloween issue yet.

Rick Snyder — address withheld



Breadlines

News Highlights



Horror Happenings

Toronto After Dark Film Festival wraps year three

With so many delicious events already bombarding Toronto's film festival calendar, one may wonder if the city could sustain an entire festival devoted exclusively to genre film. Well, the third annual Toronto After Dark answered that question with a resounding yes. This year's festival, which ran from October 17-24 at the Bloor cinema, attracted the largest crowds to date and even sold out four screenings.

It was also a chance for *Rue Morgue* to get first crack at a few notable nasties (not previously covered in the magazine) among the sixteen features that screened.

DONKEY PUNCH Oliver Blackburn/UK

A gang of enterprising young sailors picks up a gaggle of boozey British babes vacationing in the Mediterranean. They all get high and head for the high seas on a luxury yacht to embark upon an orgy that would otherwise prove to be the most memorable experience of the young men's lives. But it all goes hideously wrong when an overly enthusiastic horn-dog experiments with the mythical "donkey punch," an ill-advised technique that involves bashing the woman in the back of the head in order to benefit from the involuntary contractions of her pelvic region. Needless to say, this proves to be a major buzz kill and sets up a war of survival between the men and women that gets excessively bloody. An unconventional score by François Eudes (*Inside, High Tension*) brings to life this harrowing horror about ordinary people pushed to monstrous extremes out of fear, paranoia and the need for survival.

BRAIN DEAD Kevin Tenney/USA

This is a bizarre title for a horror film considering there's already two very well known and celebrated genre films of the same name, but then again, originality doesn't seem to be high on the list for Kevin (*Night of the Demons*) Tenney's latest. The plot's a dead giveaway: a meteor crashes to Earth and unleashes an alien goo that transforms anyone who comes into contact with it into a drooling hell-beast. Holed up inside a fishing lodge, hoping to fend off the fiends, is a ragtag band of randoms, including criminals, medical students, a televangelist and one played by gorgeous Coffin Case model Cristina Tiberia! There's plenty of boobs, blood and some uproariously righteous '80s splatter, but not enough to sustain what is essentially a hulkish script riddled with failed attempts at wit. Then again, if Diablo Cody won an Oscar for *Juno*, who knows? Maybe Kevin Tenney's future is bright after all.

I SELL THE DEAD Glenn McQuand/USA

The closing night gala of Toronto After Dark 2008 ruled. First, we were treated to Jason (*Hobo With a Shotgun* trailer) Eisener's inspired short *Treevenge* (perhaps the greatest splatter comedy since *Dead Alive*). Next up was the North American premiere of the latest from Larry (*The Last Winter*) Fessenden's *Glass Eye Pix*. Dominic Monaghan (*Lord of*



Angus Scrumm in *I Sell The Dead*

the Rings) stars in this EC Comics/Amicus Films homage as Arthur Blake, a young grave-robbler facing execution – but first, he must confess his sins to a priest (Ron Perlman). This forms the framing device for a series of flashbacks that sees the body-snatching duo of Blake and Willy Getmes (Fessenden) encounter multiple manifestations of the undead Angus Scrumm (*Phantasm*) makes his big screen violin-playing debut and the chemistry between Monaghan and Fessenden is marvelous. McQuand, Fessenden and Scrumm were on hand for an animated Q&A after the film that proved to be a festival highlight.

For more information about the Toronto After Dark Film Festival visit torontoafterdark.com

Stuart F. Andrews

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Mary Lambert directs online vampire series **Dreadlines**

Following the success of their *30 Days of Night* web serial, online horror channel fear.net has launched *The Dark Path Chronicles*, a new vampire-themed series. The seven shorts that comprise the show are written and directed by Mary Lambert, whose credits at the helm of both horror features (*Pet Sematary*, *Pet Sematary II*, *Urban Legends 3*) and music videos (Madonna's "Like a Virgin," Janet Jackson's "Control") make her uniquely suited to tackle the three-to-five-minute-long, music-driven webisodes.

"I'd been thinking about doing a vampire story for a while," explains Lambert. "Because vampires are so rock 'n' roll — sleep all day and be young forever — and they're so visual. So when my friend [fear.net producer] Elizabeth Stanley came to me, because she had been asked to bring new directors in, I already had those characters fully formed in my mind."

The series revolves around the vampire Jurgen (Carson Aune), who has just awoken from hibernation, and sixteen-year-old Samantha (Amanda Bauer), who can hear voices. Together they explore the titular *Dark Path*, a parallel dimension in which vampires can travel unseen, and into which certain "adept" humans can sometimes become entangled. Lambert compares this fictional creation to a kind of corporeal astral projection for the undead.

"I'm not so much interested in horror as I am in alternative realities and parallel existence," she admits. "Non-linear time, spirituality and mysticism, mythology — those are the things that interest me, whether it's in horror, fantasy or historical epics."

Music is key in the bloodsucker series, in which each tale is told using songs by goth, metal and electronic acts, including Zombi, Junius, Watch Me Burn and Prophet 7:13, in addition to a score by composer Sam Janso. Still, Lambert claims *Dark Path* is more driven by visuals.

"I always tried to tell a little story in my music videos but sometimes it would be so hidden people wouldn't see it," she says. "What's so great about these stories is that they depend on the visuals, and I love



The Dark Path Chronicles: Carson Aune as the vampire Jurgen

imagery so much. Like with painting or comic books, you can have a whole story in one frame. And when you combine that with music, where a song has a beginning, middle and end, you get a really good narrative arc. So each episode will give you a bite of a story — you can put it in your mouth and taste it. It's a mental stimulation, a glimpse into another world."

The Dark Path Chronicles, which was set to debut on November 6, was shot in and around Los Angeles in locations such as Griffith Park, Hollywood Blvd. and the subway system. The filmmaker claims that while money and time were tight ("There was some guerilla filmmaking going on there. I can't say much more without getting in trouble with the law!") working with fear.net allowed her more creative freedom than she would get on a big-budget video shoot.

"This is not something that could be on

MTV," she says. "I think it might be controversial even on the internet. Some people might like the story, because it's kind of sweet, about these young people coming together. But the sex scenes are pretty out there. I think nudity and the introduction of blood into the sex scenarios might offend some people. It doesn't offend me. I just think it's interesting to imagine how vampires might have sex."

For her next project, Lambert is working on a script about a seductive mermaid and is also hoping that *The Dark Path Chronicles* can be expanded to a feature-length film.

"I was able to do something here that was really from my dark heart and from my creative core, that I've rarely had a chance to do in my career. And there's a lot more to these characters, so I'd like to see where I can take them."

Liisa Ladouceur

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Dreadlines

ROADKILL

FROM THE
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jimhorwat.com

Jim Horwat scribbles homages to slasher films in a campy cartoonish style that even Jesse's mother would love. Rendered in pen and ink, Horwat's talent for composition and design guides the viewer through a visual maze of mayhem. Get lost in the gory details!

monkeygostboy.com

Freak Central is a welcomecom to a newspaper crew that investigates supernatural and paranormal occurrences. Jim Stew (the literal monkey goat boy) and his fellow staffers as they encounter oversized praying mantises, sentient ventriloquist dummies and other creatures in the closet, mostly black-and-white bite.

thehorrorsection.blogspot.com

Jay Clarke populates his blog with horror film reviews, vintage VHS box cover scans (Lorimar's *Tick or Treat*, anyone?) and photos and reports from various Southern Ontario genre events. It's a smorgasbord of content for horror film fans of various stripes and inclinations.

executedtoday.com

If you've got a hard-on for morbid historical facts, this daily execution blog is the online destination for you. Each entry features a new death—historical or recent—along with pictures and a brief synopsis of what led to the person's capture and conviction. Justice is served...

cthrulhupaloosa.protoncharching.com

Did you miss this year's H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival? Well, fear not, because there's still time to attend Cthulhupaloosa. The event takes place in Vancouver, on December 6 and will feature theatrical screenings of Lovecraftian films and music videos, a live concert by *The Darkest of the Hillside Thickets* and more. Go party with the Old Ones.



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Manhattan's FIT hosts gothic fashion exhibit

Manhattan's Fashion Institute of Technology is taking a walk on the dark side with its latest exhibition, *Gothic: Dark Glamour*, an encompassing look at the fashion movement that launched a cultural revolution. Taking a historical view of the Goth world, the retrospective pinpoints its origins in the Roman era, then follows its course through the ages, from its first proper appearance in the middle of the 19th century, through to the punk movement, and up to present day.

"Although popularly identified with black-clad teenagers and rock musicians, the gothic has been an important theme in contemporary fashion," says Dr. Valerie Steele, director of The Museum at FIT and curator of the exhibition. "The imagery of death and decay, the power of horror, and the erotic macabre are pervasively attractive to many designers."

Beginning with the rise of the gothic novel in the 18th century, gothic style has been associated with sublime themes of terror and the supernatural. The Victorian cult of mourning mandated head-to-toe black, later inspiring members of the post-punk subculture, and contributing to the image of the femme fatale and the vamp.

Set against theatrical gothic settings such as a labyrinth, a castle and a laboratory, more than 75 ensembles are on display in *Gothic: Dark Glamour*, along with artwork and photography, all weaving a tapestry of this movement.

"This exhibition has the most complicated and striking mise-en-scene I think we've ever had," says Steele. "There are introduction vignettes about the birth of gothic terror, the cult of Victorian mourning and the vampire, followed by a large gallery where we have even more elaborate sets. One is simply called *Night*, another is a *Frankenstein*-inspired laboratory display, along with the ruined castle—which is the paradigm of the gothic image. It came from the very earliest novels of terror and features in everything from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* to Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*."

The movement's influence on culture as well as fashion is evident in the post-punk wardrobe exhibited alongside Winona Ryder's blood-red dress from *Bram Stoker's Dracula*—on loan from Francis Ford Cop-



Gothic: Dark Glamour: A fashion retrospective

pola himself. Gloom fetishists will also find the Cabinet of Curiosities display appealing, with its death masks, Victorian mourning jewelry and accessories incorporating bird skulls, talons and wings.

But the real meat of the show is through the doors that challenge one to "abandon hope, all ye who enter!" The labyrinthine main gallery space is like stepping into a place where it's perpetually dark. Set against iconic themes such as *Night* (inspired by gothic images of the Dark Ages) and the Laboratory (where futuristic fashion "monsters" are created) are fashion by renowned designers including Alexander McQueen, Evan Michelson, Ricardo Tishch and Canada's own cyber-goth line Plastik Wrap. Other themes include Vells and Masks, the Bat Cave, and finally, The Haunted Palace, which draws on Poe's architectural metaphor for a disturbed mind.

"I adored doing research on what gothic means," says Steele. "It's such a strange concept, so often used as a term meaning something dark, gloomy and macabre, but for that very reason it's provided a lot of appeal for a wide variety of cultural outsiders. I was sorry to have to finish [the exhibit] as I would have happily worked on it for another year."

The Museum at FIT is located at 23rd Street and Seventh Avenue in New York City. *Gothic: Dark Glamour* runs until February 21, 2009. Admission is free. The exhibition's companion book by FIT curator Valerie Steele is available from Yale University Press.

Brad Abraham

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10 RUE MORGUE

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the Creepy family, Emily the Strange, Mike Mignola, Ben Stenbeck,
Becky Cloonan, Joshua Dysart, and Mark Wheaton.

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Weird Stats Morbid Facts

- + In the weeks following Hurricane Ike, searchers were tasked with finding approximately 200 coffins that were washed out of their graves as a result of the thirteen-foot storm surge.
- + Magician Harry Houdini died on Halloween in 1926 of a gangrenous appendix, a condition that developed after he'd been sucker-punched several days earlier in Montreal, Canada.
- + An Australian funeral director was recently found guilty of using his hearse to terrorize a woman; he chased her around Sydney in it in the middle of the night.
- + Fairy tale writer Hans Christian Andersen was so concerned about being buried alive that he insisted one of his major arteries be severed following his death – just to be sure.
- + Finnish gaming site Iastapelit.fi removed an online game called Kindergarten Killer – in which players wander around a school massacring kindergarten students – after Matti Saari killed ten people in the country's worst school shooting to date.
- + Roger Watkins' 1977 horror film *Last House on Dead End Street* was originally titled *The Cuckoo Clocks of Hell*.
- + Earlier this year a 35-year-old woman in northern India not only fought off an attacker but decapitated him in the process, then paraded his head through her village.
- + The first Stephen King novel to reach number one on the *Publisher's Weekly* yearly best-sellers list was 1984's *The Talisman*, co-written with Peter Straub.
- + Trimethylaminuria is a medical condition in which a person's body emits a powerful odor not unlike the smell of rotting fish. The scent is so strong that it can fill an entire auditorium.
- + Lon Chaney, Jr. not only starred in *Spider Baby*, he also sang the movie's theme song.
- + In a recent election, voters in Springdale, Arkansas had the option of voting for a dead candidate after Eddie Fero passed away suddenly mere days before the ballots were to be cast. Officials noted that if he were to win, the incumbent would remain in office.
- + Film reviewer John Bloom created his controversial B-movie-lovin' redneck journalist alter ego Joe Bob Briggs as "an attempt to revive a form of humorous newspaper fiction that was practiced in the late 19th century by writers like Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain."
- + On average 152,029 people die everyday on planet Earth.

Compiled by Monica S. Kuchler
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com

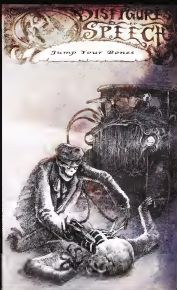
The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX



Instances of INSECT EXPULSIONS



1. *Creepshow*
Upson Pratt the cockroach vat
2. *Halloween III*
Pumpkin mask pestilence
3. *Prince of Darkness*
Hobo beetle britches
4. *The Believers*
Spider-curse skin condition
5. *The Mist*
Thoracic arachnid explosion
6. *Candyman*
Tony Todd's bee breath



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NOCTURNAL THINGS



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THE ZOMBIE OF MONTCLAIRE MOORS GARDEN SCULPTURE

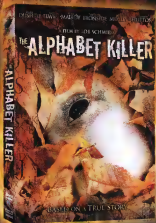
\$89

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BRAZIL'S NOTORIOUS BOOGEYMAN, **COFFIN JOE**, RISES FROM THE ASHES
WITH THE LONG-AWAITED THIRD ENTRY IN THE TRILOGY THAT BEGAN WITH ONE OF THE
MOST OUTRAGEOUS FILMS TO EVER COME OUT OF SOUTH AMERICA — OR ANYWHERE.

THE UNHOLY UNDERTAKER RETURNS!

BY SCOTT GABBEY AND JOVANKA VUCKOVIC



INTERVIEW BY SCOTT GABBEY AND PAOLO ZELATI



IN THE FRINGES OF THE FRINGE, WHERE CULT FILM CONNOISSEURS REVEL WITH DIEHARD HORROR GEEKS

and night at its blackest, you can find Coffin Joe. Long a denizen of fourth-generation bootlegs and the most discerning horror film encyclopedias, he has only recently begun to mean something to genre fans outside of South America, since several of his bizarre films have been released on DVD in the past few years. Even still, he's something of a mystery...

The story of Coffin Joe dates back to 1963, when he terrified Brazilian filmgoers with his trademark top hat, black cape and grotesquely overgrown fingernails. His boid, anti-religious attitude caused a commotion, as he mocked a religious community when he devoured a lamb chop on Holy Friday in the very first Brazilian horror film: *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*. This particular scene captures the blasphemous essence of Coffin Joe, an undertaker who will stop at nothing (including rape, torture and humiliation) to find the perfect woman to bear his child and continue his legacy.

Coffin Joe, or Zé do Caixão as he's known in South America, is the creation of José Mojica Marins, a revolutionary filmmaker whose work has been compared to Luis Buñuel, Mario Bava and Alejandro Jodorowsky. His films combine ritualistic sounds, Expressionistic photography and camera angles, eerie sets and tidbits of nihilistic, existential dialogue, sadism and extreme violence to create a nightmarish world that plays out like a prolonged fever dream. Even by today's standards, Marins' films are controversial; it's no surprise he's been thrown in jail for them and remains the most censored Brazilian filmmaker in history. (By the 1970s, 60 percent of the frames he shot had been destroyed.)

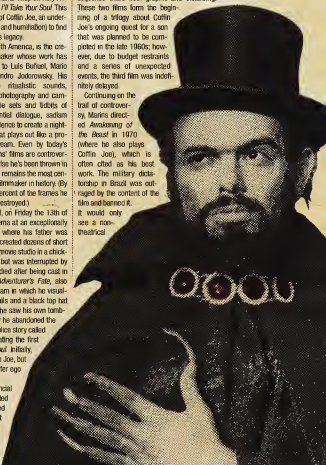
José Mojica Marins was born in São Paulo, Brazil, on Friday the 13th of March, 1936. He developed his obsession with cinema at an exceptionally young age, living in the back of a movie theatre where his father was employed. Before his sixteenth birthday, Marins had created dozens of short films; by the time he was seventeen he had his own movie studio in a chicken barn and was already planning his first feature, but was interrupted by the tragic deaths of three actresses in a row, who died after being cast in the film(s). After making Brazil's first western (*Adventure's Fate*, also banned for pornographic content), Marins had a dream in which he visualized a dark-haired, bearded man with long fingernails and a black top hat and cape dragging him through a cemetery, where he saw his own tombstone before regaining consciousness. The next day he abandoned the project he was working on (a juvenile delinquency police story called *Cursed Generation*) and immediately set upon creating the first Coffin Joe feature — *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*. Initially, Marins wanted another actor to play the role of Coffin Joe, but after several auditions he decided to assume the alter ego he had envisioned.

At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul was a massive financial success in Brazil, where viewers were both offended and entertained by the character as he skulked around graveyards damning both God and Satan, got away with rape and murder, and survived at the end of the movie. Unfortunately, Marins was a terrible businessman and earned very little from the film. It wasn't until the sequel *This Night I'll Possess*

your Corpse (1967), that he began to gain legitimate credit as a director. An even more outrageous film, it features scenes in which women are covered with hundreds of real snakes and spiders along with a ten-minute colour fell sequence that's both graphic and disturbing.

These two films form the beginning of a trilogy about Coffin Joe's ongoing quest for a son that was planned to be completed in the late 1960s; however, due to budget restraints and a series of unexpected events, the third film was indefinitely delayed.

Continuing on the trail of controversy, Marins directed *Awakening of the Abasi* in 1970 (where he also plays Coffin Joe), which is often cited as his best work. The military dictatorship in Brazil was outraged by the content of the film and banned it. It would only see a non-theatrical



THE BRAZILIAN DICTATORSHIP WAS OUTRAGED BY *AT MIDNIGHT I'LL TAKE YOUR SOUL*. I WAS CONSIDERED A DISCIPLE OF SATAN.



JOSÉ MOJICA MARINS

Cap INFERNO MAL



release outside of Brazil twenty years later. Despite this, Marins went on to direct and star in a variety of features in different genres throughout the decades (from dramas to exploitation films), in addition to several other Coffin Joe pictures (see p.20).

Remarkably, Coffin Joe wasn't introduced to North America until 1983, when Mike Vraney of Something Weird Video released what was the largest available selection of his films at the time. The English translation of *Zé do Caxado* was "Joseph of the Coffin," which Vraney shortened to "Coffin Joe." Once the Something Weird Video tapes were in circulation, North American viewers began to catch on, and you would occasionally hear the name Coffin Joe muttered amongst fanatics of offbeat film, or find a reference to his work in underground horror magazines.

Considering three decades had passed since *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* premiered in Brazil, the overall reaction was different in North America. The shock value was virtually lost, but there was still a taboo quality to the movies – especially considering that they seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. The prints were grainy, and there wasn't a lot of easily accessible information explaining what they were all about. On the other side of the spectrum, the deal with Something Weird Video resulted in a great deal of attention for Marins back in Brazil. While Coffin Joe's notoriety in North America is presently of cult status, the character is a household name in his native country, thanks in part to the American press the Something Weird releases attracted. As Coffin Joe, Marins has hosted several television shows (including *The Strange World of Coffin Joe*), has appeared in comics, has had a line of

cosmetics, shampoo and liquid, run for political office and was even a part of the Carnival festival last year, waving to children from a float.

Despite the popularity the filmmaker has gained in Brazil, his ascetic vision has remained intact. In 2000, Brazilian editor/producer Paulo Sacramento, and director/screenwriter Denisson Ramalho presented Marins, now 72, with a proposal to complete the trilogy he began in 1963. The film is titled *Embodiment of Evil*, and Marins describes it as being his most outrageous work to date. Picking up where *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse* left off, the story (co-written by Ramalho, see p.23) sees Coffin Joe released from prison after 40 years (Raymond Castle plays the young Coffin Joe in flashbacks). Once again, he continues his quest for the superior woman to bear him the perfect child.

Keeping up with the times, *Embodiment of Evil* is chock full of top-notch torture sequences with special effects provided by respected Brazilian artist Kapel Furtado. After several years of production, the film premiered in São Paulo on August 8, 2008 to an eager crowd of filmmakers. Marins personally chose the date, citing its mystical significance in numerology ("if 666 is the number of Satan and 777 is the number of God, 888 is the number of Coffin Joe – the number of Man, who is above God and the Devil," he says). As of press time the film has no North American release date but is currently playing film festivals.

No question, Coffin Joe's brand of black magic is very much alive and still dangerous. This issue, *Rue Morgue* speaks with José Mojica Marins and gives the devil his due...

When you began your career, what was the situation like for Brazilian cinema?

At that time, halfway through the '50s, there were some big studios in Brazil, but I studied in Marília (just outside of São Paulo), where Italian director Mario Sironi ran a studio – not as big as the other ones, but pretty good and famous. Cinema in Brazil was in good health; a lot of young people were interested in moviemaking, great energy in the air. Then, suddenly, the studios closed down, one by one. So the only way to make a movie was by investing private money in it. Director, actors and crew – everybody put a quote [in] to finance the movie. This way, in 1958, I realized *Adventure's Fate*, which was a huge success at that time. But right after the national release I had a nasty problem with Catholic censorship. In the movie there was a scene where two young ladies take a bath, naked, so they accused me of obscenity and *Adventure's Fate* was banned almost everywhere. The incredible thing is that the two ladies are shot from a very long distance! I really don't know how the priests discovered they were naked! They began to call me "the pornographer" and they said I had been cursed by God himself and that in two, three years I was going to die. Do you believe it?

Yes! Is it true that after this "curse," an old priest friend of yours suggested you do a movie in order to "clean" your reputation and "save your soul"?

Blood From Brazil: (top to bottom) Posters for Hellish Flesh, Strange World of Naked Pleasures and Awakening of the Beast (signed to Forrest J Ackerman), from the collection of Ray Collins.

Yes, it's true. His name is Father Lopez, today he's 95. He and some of his friends suggested I do a "good" movie, something to cancel the reputation I got with my previous one. So, I did *Meu Destino* am Tias Mãos, which is essentially a musical. The story deals with these priests who help the young children who escaped from their houses. . . I portrayed them as heroes. Then, the movie ends on Christmas night with everybody singing "White Christmas."

How did you create the Coffin Joe character?

I have always been an insomniac; if I want to sleep I have to take a certain pill, very strong. One evening, after taking it, I fell asleep on the table during dinner and I had a very strange dream. I saw this weird man, dressed in black, who guided me into a cemetery and he showed me a tombstone — my tombstone. There were two dates, birth and death, but I could not read the death date, it was too blurry. When I woke up I was very excited about that dream, but the people around me thought I was possessed by some sort of evil spirit, so they insisted on bringing me to an old priest or something like that for an exorcism. But at that point everything was clear in my mind: I didn't want them to take "the devil" out of me! Instead, I decided I wanted to make a movie about my "new condition," and that movie was *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*. I remember that I ran out into the street and right to my office; I woke up my secretary at 5 a.m. and I said, "Get ready! We have to begin a new movie!" So, that night we wrote the story in a couple of pages and, the next day, I offered it to my partners. They all refused to do it, but I was so determined that I sold the house that I was building: the only things left to me were some clothes.

What made you decide you were going to play the character of Coffin Joe yourself?

At that time I was very thin, [105 lbs], and I already had a long beard but I didn't feel I could play the main character of the movie: I was too weak, while Coffin Joe had to be strong. So I organized a casting call for the main role, watching a lot of actors from cinema and theatre. Once

I decided on an actor, a guy who was pretty known at that time, he refused to play such a funny character like Coffin Joe. So I understood that my only chance was to play Coffin Joe on my own. I already had a black suit, then I rented a top hat, my assistant provided me with eight fake nails; and I created the meditation with the phoenix symbol.

So, can we say that the character of Coffin Joe has been moulded on the man you saw in your nightmare?

Not completely. That nightmare, as I said, gave me the impulse to create the character, but in the following days I expended that figure with my imagination, creating Coffin Joe's philosophy. He was a lonely man looking for what I call "the perfect woman," a woman without any feeling, no love and no hate, just pure. Coffin Joe's main desire is to have a son from this perfect woman, a son that would give him immortality.

What do you remember about the shooting of this first Coffin Joe movie?

I remember that the crew wanted to be paid at the end of each day, they didn't trust me, they couldn't wait till the end of shooting.

What is the difference between José Mojica Marins and Coffin Joe?

There is a big difference. The character looks for a woman to bear his son. I have been married six times, and I have seven children and seven grandchildren. Coffin Joe does not have any I believe in God. Coffin Joe only believes in himself. I can't get to sleep if I see a mosquito flying around my bedroom. Coffin Joe can have rats and spiders crawling around his room and sleep calmly. The only thing we have in common is that I like children, and Coffin Joe likes children.



Coffin Joe in *Exorcismo Negro*, and (below) one of the *Zé do Caixão* comic books.

Before Coffin Joe, was there a horror genre already established in Brazil?

I'm the first one who made a horror movie in Brazil and the critics, who had a very bad opinion of the fantastic cinema, practically destroyed me. Brazil is a very mystical country, with a lot of superstitious beliefs, but horror cinema was discriminated against, a real taboo, and a genre that directors could not do. Today, everybody wants to make horror movies in Brazil. This genre is no longer underestimated, young directors and

Continued on page 22...



HOLD ON TO YOUR SOULS:
RUE MORQUE PRESENTS THIRTEEN
OF **COFFIN JOE's**
MOST UNNERVING FILMS.

VISIONS OF HELL

THE ESSENTIAL JOSÉ MOJICA MARINS FILMOGRAPHY  BY SCOTT GABBEY

Coffin Joe THIS NIGHT
I WILL POSSESS
YOUR CORPSE



At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul (1964)

In this film, José Mojica Marins appears for the first time as the character of Coffin Joe. In search of a superior woman to bear a perfect child, he terrorizes a small town, curses the creator of the universe and dabbles with supernatural forces beyond his control.

This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse (1967)

In this sequel to *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*, Coffin Joe continues his quest for the perfect woman to carry on his legacy. It also contains the notorious sequence of Coffin Joe in hell, which is the only scene in the film that appears in colour. Respected Brazilian director Glauber Rocha declared this film "genius."

The Strange World of Coffin Joe (1968)

This anthology includes stories about four criminals running afoul of a murderous doll maker and his alluring daughters, a crippled balloon man and his necrophilic longings, and a pro-

fessor testing his theory about love overcoming deprivation, which is exercised through a week of unrelenting torture.

Awakening of the Beast (1970)

This, possibly Brazil's first psychedelic film, features controlled LSD use in a psychiatric study to determine the effects of Coffin Joe while under the influence. As bizarre as it gets, and strongly endorsed by Marins himself.

The End of Man (1971)

Marins plays the role of Finis Hominis, a prophet who comes from the sea and walks through the town completely naked, absconding his followers with miracles and mysticism.

When the Gods Fall Asleep (1972)

In this sequel to *The End of Man*, Finis Hominis escapes from the mental asylum in hopes of restoring a sense of decency into a world that appears to be completely mad.



THE STRANGE WORLD OF COFFIN JOE

The Bloody Exorcism of Coffin Joe (1974)

Marins plays himself, a director who assumes the role of Coffin Joe and is working on his latest feature *The Demon Exorcist*. He proclaims that the character of Coffin Joe does not exist, but is forced to question the possibility after a series of eerie occurrences.

Strange Hostel of Naked Pleasures (1976)

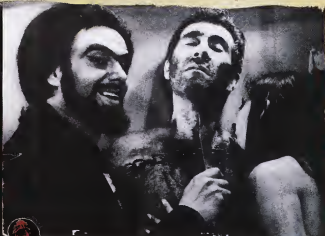
Coffin Joe is the owner of a haunted hostel where strange sexual antics and methods of torture are regularly practiced. Very stylishly directed, set to an amazing soundtrack and terribly underrated.

Bellish Flesh (1977)

Dr. George Medeiros, played by Marins, is too wrapped up in his work to pay attention to his wife. She commits adultery and attempts to murder Dr. Medeiros by throwing acid in his face. He recovers and seeks revenge. This film notoriously contains real footage of eye surgery from Marins' own visit to the hospital.

Hauntings of a Deranged Mind (1978)

The story of a man terrorized by dreams of Cul-



The Strange World of Coffin Joe: A scene from "Ideology," the final installment in the anthology.

fin Joe is used as a foundation for this collection of scenes that were omitted from his previous films. These are the scenes that were banned by the military dictatorship rolled up in one glorious package presented in black and white and colour.

Perversion (1979)

An absolutely outrageous film in which Marins plays the role of a womanizing millionaire named Vitorio Palestrina. It contains the infamous scene where Marins bites off a woman's nipple, puts it in a glass container and shows it to his guests at a social gathering. He later falls in love with the woman's sister, who decides to avenge the incident through an unforgettable act of violence.

Demons and Wonders (1987)

A 48-minute autobiographical film that permits the viewer a glance at the horrors of indepen-

dent filmmaking in Brazil, Marins' never-ending conflict with the authorities and personal health issues. This is told from Coffin Joe's point of view, and contains recognizable soundtrack material that will surely widen a few eyes.

Embodiment of Evil (2008)

The third installment in the Coffin Joe trilogy, preceded by *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* and *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse*, sees Coffin Joe released from prison and hiding out in a shelter in São Paulo with a group of followers who were waiting for his arrival. His quest for the perfect woman continues, and the scenes of torture hideously escalate to a modern-day level. **B**

Scott Gabbery is the publisher/lector of *Ultra Violent Magazine*.





Coffin Joe amps up the sex and violence style newest film, *Embodiment of Evil*

young audiences are very fond of horror now. I won seven important prizes with [my new film] *Embodiment of Evil* and even the critics appreciated it.

Did you have any favourite directors or reference when you were making your films?

I really know very few things, I've never followed other directors' work. Once, I attended a talk show in the United States and we talked about foreign horror and I had some people explaining to me about Dario Argento, Mario Bava and other horror directors. I also discovered Buñuel many years after his best movies.

Considering Brazil is primarily a Catholic country, what was the initial audience reaction to *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*?

There was a very violent reaction. Not only was the Church angry at me, but also the Brazilian students from the studio as security guards, because people were very angry at me. I was excommunicated from the church that I used to attend as a child. In 1964 to 1968 things were very complicated. Religion was very strong, and during the dictatorship period, I was being watched very closely. During the filming of *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse* I met with a girl and boy who were the children of a general, and they ended up playing carrels in the film, so I was protected by their parents. It was because of this relationship that I was able to complete *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse*.

After the success you had with the first two Coffin Joe movies, were you conscious that you were a sort of symbol, an icon for a lot of people?

Yes, I was. But I wasn't conscious about

the consequences of this. Censorship and the dictatorial regime were always behind me. I've also been imprisoned for my work.

How do you feel the overall opinion of your work has changed over the years?

In the early '90s I went to America and was the subject of many magazine [features]. All of this popularity earned me respect in Brazil. Thirteen of my films were released by Mike Vraney of Something Weird Video. After all of that publicity, I was able to earn a following among college students. Finally, Brazil understood what I was trying to say with my films. Today, I go to the same colleges and have a huge following amongst the students of communication, and it's mainly due to my success in the United States as Coffin Joe. The American magazine coverage that I have received has helped me immensely here in Brazil. My lifetime of work, which used to be considered trash, is now looked at with respect.

Because you are looked upon as a cultural icon, did this limit what you could do with *Embodiment of Evil* in terms of content?

On the contrary, I have shown with *Embodiment of Evil* that I am as violent as ever. In the first film, *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*, the girl commits suicide. In *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse*, the son is about to be born, but both mother and child die. Now, in the third film, he proceeds with his methods of torture and violence and impregnates seven intelligent and special women. As a result, he will finally be able to see the birth of his son.

***Embodiment of Evil* concludes the trilogy that you began in the 1960s. Why has it taken so long to get this project off the ground?**

This film is a malediction. I have taken all of my frustration from other people and assembled it into a single negative reaction. All of this makes up the project *Embodiment of Evil*. I believe this malediction was cast upon me for the past 40 years and could only be broken by young idealists that believed that the impossible could become possible. During the project I was imprisoned by the famous military dictatorship, and was



I CONSIDER EMBODIMENT OF EVIL TO BE THE BIBLE OF LATIN AMERICAN HORROR FILMS.



JOSE MOJICA MARINS

EMBODIMENT OF EVIL CO-WRITER **DENNISON RAMALHO**
EXPLAINS WHY THE FILM IS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN KINDRED BLACK SOULS.

BLOOD BROTHERS

by KIER-LA JANISSE



After 40 years, José Mojica Marins' alter ego Coffin Joe returns with *Embodiment of Evil*, the final film in a twisted trilogy that he began in 1964. And this time he has a special weapon up his black sleeve: scriptwriter Dennison Ramalho.

Both Marins and Ramalho were working in the limited scene of subterranean Brazilian filmmaking, so it was no surprise that the artists would eventually meet (in 1995) — Ramalho, the eager fan and collector, and Marins, a living legend. The older filmmaker proceeded to guide Ramalho through his own directorial debut.

"He has always helped me with my own movies," says Ramalho, who co-wrote *Embodiment of Evil* with Marins, "as a mentor, counsellor or even decoder. My first short, *Nocturno* (1999) is dedicated to him."

Nocturno made a few waves on the festival circuit. But nearly five years later Ramalho's breakthrough voodoo film *Love From Mother Only* would leave audiences shaken with its mixture of primal sex, black magic rituals, brutal violence and visceral gore. One got the sense from watching it that Ramalho would actually cut your heart out and eat it (the film was co-written by a still-incarcerated Macumba Priest).

Having firmly established an artistic kinship with Marins, Ramalho and producer Paulo Sacramento proposed the idea for *Embodiment of Evil* to him in 2000, then spent seven years trying to realize what would become the closing chapter in "The Coffin Joe Trilogy" before they finally secured the budget through public subsidy programs.

"José has many admirers, but many detractors, too," says Ramalho. "It was all a matter of persisting until we finally had the right funding program and the right jury to approve our financing. But we bumped our faces into many juries who completely despised him."

Ramalho and Sacramento rescued the script from an abandoned 1968 draft and recontextualized it in modern-day São Paulo. As in the previous films, Coffin

Joe — now weathered by 40 years spent in prison — pursues his lifetime goal of finding a superior woman to breed a perfect son ("a child who will carry on his legacy of murder, heresy and individualism").

Ramalho maintains that the real joy for him was working with Marins to update the Coffin Joe aesthetic, find new ways to shock the audience — nudity, gruesome torture, ceremonial blasphemy and a death-by-cocodriloes all figure into the film — and tap into Brazilian culture.

"Coffin Joe is a mythic creature," explains Ramalho. "In certain remote parts of Brazil people have heard about him and think of him as a folkloric boogeyman. They don't have the faintest idea he's a character from Brazilian cinema. José's lifetime work is a world apart from all Latin cinema, because it's outlandish and visceral."

Ramalho's interest in dark Brazilian Macumba (the subject of his forthcoming films *The Hell Within* and *The Three Cuts*) inevitably makes its way into *Embodiment*, inspired in part by his favourite Marins picture, *When God Fell Asleep* (1969).

"It's José at his most dangerous," his Ramalho says of the movie. "The film has some gruesome shockumentary segments depicting a real black magic ceremony in Brazil.

There, animals are savagely disemboweled by possessed priests, in a manner that would make [Carnival Holocaust director] Ruggero Deodato run scared like a baby! I was deeply disturbed by these images, and have seen no rival to them... to this day."

Ramalho is adamant about keeping the bizarre worlds of both Marins and Coffin Joe alive and thriving — even if they're not always understood, especially at home.

"In Brazil, during the '60s and '70s his filmmaking was considered highly subversive currency — that was during the military dictatorship period. Nowadays, most Brazilian newspapers still do not understand him, his high-conceptual work and dangerous art. Believe me, he's much more loved abroad than at home."





Embodiment Of Evil: Coffin Joe gets bitten by one of his victims and (below) Raymond Castle as young Coffin Joe.

only released because of my friendship with family members of the military. I ended up unemployed, nearly starving and having difficulties raising enough money to support my family. The original producer that was writing to make the film died right before my eyes. There was an American producer that was interested in the script and only asked for a few changes, but before he could come up with the initial investment he died of throat cancer. In 1998 I was approached by a Brazilian producer named Ivan Novais, who produced *Occult City*, which was the first Brazilian comic book story that was adapted into film. On the first day of shooting Ivan called to report that he was buying fish to bring for lunch on the set. At this time we had a budget of \$1.5 million. He was willing to pay everyone in advance, including the cast and crew. I received another phone call and was informed that instead of this lunch that we had planned, there was going to be a wake. He had died of a cardiac arrest. It has taken 40 years, of which I have struggled, to make this motion picture. As with any malediction, one day it has to cease.

What changed?

Two young people came to me. One of them was a horror film buff named Dennison Ramalho. The other was Paulo Sacramento, who had gained a lot of popularity as one of the best film editors in Brazil. These two guys proposed a contract in the year 2000 asking if I would make *Embodiment of Evil* with them. I had nothing to lose so I accepted the contract, and soon afterwards I saw the miracle being performed. Nobody believed this film would ever be made. Dennison began to make changes to the script in order to bring the story to the present time. Finally, 40 years after *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse*, I can finish the trilogy. I consider *Embodiment of Evil* to be the bible of Latin American horror films. The film consists of Coffin Joe aging like a normal man with the same philosophy and ideology as 1863, only more brutal and violent.

Embodiment of Evil doesn't portray Catholicism in a positive light. How did you deal with this message, being Catholic yourself?

Coffin Joe is just a character, he's not me. A movie is something that can be completely different from reality; I mean, if you think of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, we can say the same thing: they were just actors doing a movie. I'm Catholic, it's true,

but I'm not a fanatic, I'm not looking for punishment or castration and so I can criticize what I want. If a person can get rid of a fanatic approach to life, he can deliver great works in literature, poetry, theatre and cinema. But we must be free from the fear of punishment. Also the Catholic establishment, the priests, who should follow the Bible, often don't. They have children, they care about money, they rape children and so on.

Embodiment of Evil contains a scene that consists of death by cockroaches. This is a concept that you have had in mind for decades. How do you feel about the outcome of the scene?

One of my actresses, Lary Dark, willingly interacted with hundreds of live cockroaches. When a lot of modern directors would use CGI for this type of scene, we used live cockroaches of all different varieties. We contacted many biologists that raised cockroaches for laboratory experiments. The [insects] were all different colours, like red and white, and of all different sizes. This scene scared the shit out of the technicians and all of the actors. The entire crew just wanted the day to end. The close-ups were difficult to make because we had to position the camera directly next to the insects in order to achieve the shots of the actress and the cockroaches. The actress finished the scene, but was not able to overcome the trauma. She still sees cockroaches everywhere in the house. The world is going to see a scene that nobody has ever dared to create. There have been many other films dealing with insects, but they are always computerized, so we decided to make this very real. I'm eager to know how the public will feel about this particular scene.

One of the most interesting aspects of your latest movie is its capacity to be very respectful of the original spirit of Coffin Joe and at the same time be very modern and political – connected to contemporary Brazilian society. What can you tell me about this?

I can say that all the people who used to say that Coffin Joe was trash, now they've changed their minds, saying it's "cult." Fantastic cinema has a great power in dealing with social and political issues, and this kind of cinema is effective all over the world because everybody can understand a horror movie – where death is, there's also terror. That's why, just like I did with *Embodiment of Evil*, you can utilize horror movies to convey social messages to people. And I know that in Brazil many directors want to follow my example. ☸



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**DARK SKY
FILMS**



WRIGHTSON

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO A FAMED COMIC BOOK ARTIST REBARE MARY SHELLEY'S SERIAL MONSTER TALE IN HIS OWN VISION. NOW ONE OF THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER ADAPTATIONS OF THAT MASTERWORK LIVES AGAIN.

BERNIE WRIGHTSON'S Frankenstein Reborn

BY JAMES GRAINGER

REVERED COMICS ARTIST AND ILLUSTRATOR

Bernie Wrightson may be best known as the co-creator of one of comicdom's most enduring and endearing monsters, the goop-dripping eco-warrior Swamp Thing, but get him talking about horror creatures past and present and he'll tell you that one monster, the tragic villain of a difficult, philosophical novel written in the early 19th century by a then-obscure female author, trumps them all.

The novel: *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. The author: Mary Shelley.

The monster is a trickier affair. Often erroneously referred to by his fictional creator's surname, Dr. Victor Frankenstein's lumpy creation was never dignified with a first or last name. He is, furthermore, the anonymous beast, the gnarled, shuffling granddaddy of the modern monster.

Comic book fans also know that Wrightson consummated a lifetime love affair with the doomed boneyard beast with an artistic tribute that has become one of the most sought-after books of the last 25 years: *Bernie Wrightson's Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. His illustrated version of Shelley's novel was originally published in a hardcover edition by Marvel Comics in 1983. Containing nearly 50 of Wrightson's beautiful and painstakingly rendered line drawings alongside Shelley's text, the long out-of-print collaboration was something of a Holy Grail for comics collectors and horror fans, a situation that has now been rectified with the publication of a 25th anniversary edition by Dark Horse Books.

The publication couldn't come soon enough for Wrightson, who has been helplessly fielding requests for the book at conventions for two decades now.

"I used to tell them to try their luck on eBay or amazon.com," Wrightson tells *Rue Morgue* from his home in Los Angeles. "Other than that, there was nothing I could do."

The new 9"x12" clothbound hardcover edition contains Stephen King's original introduction, a short, typically blunt essay that introduces not only Wrightson's evocative, haunting illustrations but the novel itself, which King admits does not make for an easy read, especially for those arriving via James Whale's iconic Universal film adaptations of the 1930s. Wrightson was one of those readers.

"I saw all of the Universal Frankenstein movies for the first time on TV in the late 1950s," he says. "I was just a kid, seven or eight, and they caught hold of my imagination and I fell in love with the character of the monster."

That love did not initially transfer to an appreciation for the movies' source material, though. As King notes in his introduction, more high expectations are dashed upon reading *Frankenstein* than any other book in the English language—a sentiment Wrightson shares.



**JACK PIERCE'S
MAKEUP NEVER
SEEMED TO FIT THE
MONSTER, AT LEAST
NOT IN MY MIND.**

Rennie Wrightson

"I was around eleven or twelve when I tried reading the book for the first time, and like most people I couldn't get through it. I had to put it down because it was incomprehensible. I forced my way through it about a year later and I still didn't much like it. It was so not like the movie."

In fact, Shelley's original shares little in common with *Whale's* cinematic adaptations other than the basic plot of an overreaching scientist who dabbles with the forces of creation, inadvertently birthing a grotesque monster that wreaks havoc on the lives of the innocent. But when Wrightson reread the novel for a high school book report a few years later, something clicked.

"I read the novel a lot more the second time around. Little by little the story began to foster in my head, especially some of Shelley's images." Wrightson was especially captivated by the monster, who, in Shelley's version, is an articulate, well-meaning soul trapped in a misshapen lump of chemically fused body parts culled from graveyards and slaughterhouses by the arrogant but idealistic student Victor Frankenstein.

Drawn to Shelley's sympathetic but understandably psychotic creature, Wrightson began drawing scenes from the novel in which the monster makes an appearance. From the start, he based his drawings on Shelley's work alone, ignoring Jack



Pierce's pioneering makeup work and Boris Karloff's mute performance in the films.

"Jack Pierce's makeup never seemed to fit the monster," Wrightson says, "at least not in my mind. I loved the movies, but I wanted to capture Shelley's vision."

Wrightson continued drawing scenes from the novel, but it wasn't until the early 1970s, after he'd established himself with his work on DC's *House of Mystery*, *House of Secrets* and *Swamp Thing* series that he conceived of creating an illustrated version. He had recently set up shop as a freelance illustrator and comics artist, a situation that allowed him to periodically take time off between jobs, and soon he was devoting the bulk of his non-paying hours to the ambitious side project. Choosing the scenes to illustrate was challenging — as Wrightson says, the novel contains "a lot of quiet scenes where no one is doing much of anything" — but he already knew exactly how he wanted his monster to look.

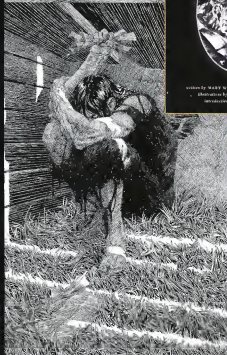
"I wanted to depict him in almost as vague a way as he was described in the book," Wrightson explains. "There's a lot of speculation about what Shelley had in mind for the monster. She mentions that Victor got some of his

materials from the slaughterhouse, so maybe there are animal parts mixed in with the human. There is also no mention of stitches, so you can't look at my monster and see where his arm is attached because she didn't specifically mention stitching anything. However Victor built the monster, it's all very mysterious."

There is nothing vague about Wrightson's version of the monster, however. Massive and muscular, with a rictus half-grin and sad eyes that quickly blaze with fury, the doomed creature combines the subtle characterization and romantic strains of Shelley's prose with the decidedly modern sensibilities of Wrightson's artistic heroes, including EC Comics icons Jack Davis and Graham Ingels, fantasy and sci-fi artist Frank Frazetta and turn-of-the-century pen-and-ink illustrator Franklin Booth.

In keeping with Shelley's original vision, Wrightson also ensured that his monster, no matter how many hideous flourishes were added to the illustrations, would remain the novel's most sympathetic character, especially when compared to Victor Frankenstein.

"Victor's voice comes across very often as a whine," Wrightson says, "and he seems to spend a lot of time justifying himself for what he's done with-



out over really accepting responsibility. The monster wants him to accept responsibility, which is why he murders members of his family. He's like a neglected child trying to get his father's attention."

In all, it took Wrightson over seven years to complete the drawings. For a while he considered self-publishing but realized that he was neither a businessman nor a publisher. Then, around 1980, Jim Shooter, publisher at Marvel Comics, heard about the *Frankenstein* project and asked if Wrightson would consider publishing the illustrated book with Marvel, which was trying to get its graphic novels – still something of a novelty at that time – into regular bookstores. Shooter figured that Wrightson's *Frankenstein* collaboration, which could be sold as an illustrated book, would be the perfect wedge to break graphic novels into stores.

Marvel green-lit the project, and while work commenced Wrightson received a phone call from Stephen King.

"Stephen, who I'd never met, called me and said he was a big fan of mine and explained that he was making a comic-book movie with George Romero in Pittsburgh called *Creepshow*," he recalls. "He said that he and George would love to have an actual comic book to tie in with the film. The movie was already being made, so I had about three months to come up with a complete full-colour comic book. I did it, and King was so happy that I came through on time that he said if there was anything he could

do for me I just had to ask. So I said, 'It just so happens that I'm working on this illustrated book and the people at Marvel will wet their pants if they have a Stephen King intro.' He said, 'Yeah, you got it.'"

King submitted his introduction, and Marvel published the book in 1983 to rave reviews. Wrightson estimates that ten to fifteen thousand copies were published, although Marvel had little luck placing the book in conventional stores because of snobbish attitudes about comic book art. A number of copies were also destroyed in "either a fire or a flood in a warehouse," according to the artist, a disaster he claims was repeated when Underwood Miller reprinted the book in 1985.

"Most of the copies of that edition were also destroyed, again in a flood or a fire. It's like the Curse of *Frankenstein* or something."

Despite a scarcity of copies, the book remained a fan favourite, so when the 25th anniversary of its publication was approaching, Wrightson contemplated a silver-anniversary edition. He was working on the *City of Others* series with Stew Niles for Dark Horse, and at some point Wrightson mentioned his plan to series editor Shawnna Gore. Soon publisher Mike Richards was brought on board and the project came to fruition in the form of the new, oversized edition – available in comic shops and bookstores.

Wrightson hopes the book will help introduce reluctant readers to Shelley's novel, as well as satisfying fan demand for the artwork, which he still regards with fondness.

"In my 40-year career it's the best thing I ever did," he admits. "I found a window into these illustrations and I was absolutely ready to do all that work at that time. I was at the peak of what I do in terms of technique and skill."

Ultimately, it's all about the monster, which is why Wrightson has never seriously considered undertaking a similar illustration project. "I've been asked if I'd ever do *Dracula* as a companion piece, but it just doesn't resonate with me the same way," he says. "We all have our favourite monsters. For some it's the Wolfman or the Mummy or *Dracula*. For me, the *Frankenstein* monster has always been my labour of love." ☞



FROM LEISURE BOOKS, HORROR FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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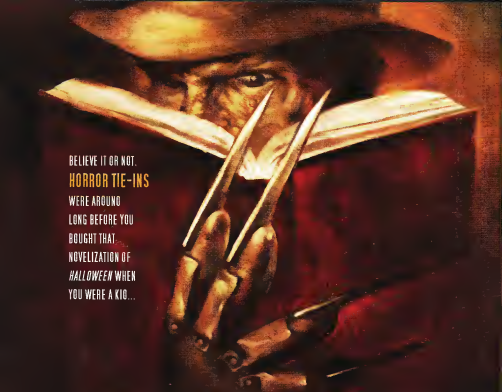


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An illustration of a person wearing a wide-brimmed hat, holding an open book. Their hand, which appears to be a clawed glove, is positioned over the book. The background is dark and moody, with warm lighting highlighting the book and the person's face.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT,
HORROR TIE-INS
WERE AROUND
LONG BEFORE YOU
BOUGHT THAT
NOVELIZATION OF
HALLOWEEN WHEN
YOU WERE A KID...

PAPERBACK SHUDDERS

the **HISTORY OF HORROR NOVELIZATIONS**

BY JAMES DURRELL AND MONICA S. KUEBLER ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN ERICKSON

THE TIE-IN NOVEL MAY BE AN OFTEN MALIGNED form of literature, but that doesn't stop many of us from having fond memories of supermarket racks brimming with a veritable marquee of paperback adaptations. The colourful images and reproductions of movie posters on their covers have for decades attracted curious genre-loving teens like moths to a flame. For impressionable horror fans not yet old enough to indulge in the thrills of R-rated movies, this was the next best thing.

"Of course, there are kids who'll read the book because they're not old enough to get into the movie," explains Deborah Allison, a London-based cinema programmer who has written academically about novelizations and contributed to numerous international film journals, including *Film Quarterly*, *Senses of Cinema* and *Film Criticism*. "There are other people who make a more conscious decision to read novelizations because they are really into

the film or TV series they're based on. Some will read the book afterwards, as a way of extending the enjoyment they've already taken from the original. Others will read them beforehand, and the novelization normally does come out first, because they simply can't wait to find out about the plot or new characters of the latest instalment of a popular franchise."

Tie-in novels are not a modern creation; they date back to the silent film era, in fact. In their earliest form, popular in the 1920s, both silent films and "talkies" of all genres were "novelized" in what were called "photoplay editions." These elegant books, which featured stunning artwork from the film's production, were typically hardcover reprints of the novels from which the films had been adapted. For instance, New York-based publishers Grosset & Dunlap released books based on several classic Lon Chaney thrillers, such as 1923's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and 1925's *The Phantom of the Opera*—though these were essentially just the Victor Hugo and Gaston Leroux classics repackaged with images of Chaney.

Other books, however, were original works where the film's script was adapted into a new narrative, as is the case with the novelization of Chaney's 1927 long-lost chiller *London After Midnight*, written by Marie Cordidge-Risk. Additional notable titles from this period include Universal's original 1931 releases of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* featuring the Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley classics with images of Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff; an adaptation of *King Kong* penned by author and former New York Daily newspaper reporter Delos Wheeler Lovelace; and an original adaptation of 1935's *Bride of Frankenstein*, written by Michael Egremont.

As popular as they were during the 1920s and '30s, horror film novelizations waned during the Second World War. Changing social attitudes resulted in a move away from horror entertainment, which at the time was still primarily intended for adults. However, with the onset of the Cold War and North America's growing fascination with science fiction in the early '50s, the tides shifted and horror novelizations found a brand-new audience: kids and teens. This was due in no small part to the hugely popular television broadcast of the classic Universal horrors in a syndicated package called *Shock! Theatre*, as well as Hammer Films' updated, full-colour retellings of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, and Roger Corman's elegant macabre period thrillers based on the stories of Poe. With newly launched monster mags such as *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and *Castle of Frankenstein* flying off the newsstands, the time was ripe for film novelizations to make a huge comeback. And they did, partly because

publishers knew exactly how to market these titles to their intended audience. Many of the books from this era were low-budget offerings printed on cheap paper, featuring garishly lurid covers, not to mention sensational blurbs that easily enticed many a wide-eyed youth.

Printed by publishers such as Monarch, Crest,

NOVELIZATIONS AREN'T
NECESSARILY IMPOVERISHED
VERSIONS OF MOVIES. BY
FLESHING OUT CHARACTERS
AND SITUATIONS THEY CAN
ADD SOMETHING TOO...

DEBORAH ALLISON

Pan, Dell, Signet, Bantam, Award, Sphere and Ballantine, these paperback nightmares were based on everything from the gothic horrors of Hammer Studios, the Vincent Price/Poe pictures, various Amicus anthologies and Hitchcock thrillers to a variety of other creature features. Sadly, this was also the period in which novelizations became notorious for being less-than-stellar works of fic-

tion. Many of the books of this era were lifeless adaptations written in stilted and pedestrian prose by overworked and underpaid authors, who would receive little or no additional compensation (in the form of royalties) if they spent more time on the material.

"Given that most of them were churned out very quickly, it's unsurprising that a fair few weren't especially well written," elaborates Allison. "But, on the other hand, many of the authors — Robert Bloch, for instance — are also respected genre novelists in their own right. Personally, I think that you can get too hung up on the issue of originality and that novelizations have as much or as little claim to 'literary' status as any other novels of a similar calibre. I'm not sure that elitist notions of literary value are especially helpful."

In some cases, though, the books were penned by individuals who insisted on infusing the tales with campy language and striking imagery, as well as a generous sprinkling of sex and violence only hinted at in their onscreen counterparts. For example, the novelization of Hammer's 1960s classic *The Brides of Dracula* (by Dean Owen) was fleshed out, pun intended, with additional characters and scenes that went well beyond the customary ravishing of young, bare throats. Because many screenplays weren't (and still aren't) long enough to translate into a novel-length work, characters, locales and action sequences were often lengthened and explored in more depth. Furthermore, if timing or creative conflicts were an issue, a film's screenplay may have undergone several changes during filming, and if there wasn't time enough to address those alterations before the book was



printed, it often ended up being markedly different than the film.

"Novelizations aren't necessarily impoverished versions of movies," Allison notes. "By fleshing out characters and situations they can add something too, and augment the viewing experience by offering new perspectives on their source material. And let's remember also, for some people their source material doesn't really matter in the slightest, they're just books."

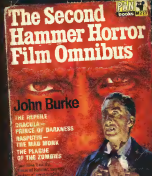
Of course, when horror movies began to change tone in the late 1980s, due to the release of films such as *Night of the Living Dead*, tie-in novels changed right along with them. Gone were the gothic tales of vampires and werewolves — they were replaced with psychological horrors, demonic possessions, evil children (and houses) and violent, murderous psychopaths.

The '80s continued to be a fertile period for this brand of literature, with novelizations of everything from the movies of John Carpenter (*The Fog*, *The Thing*), David Cronenberg (*Rabid*, *The Brood*, *Scanners*, *Videodrome*) and Brian De Palma (*Dressed to Kill*), to the numerous sequels in such prolific series as *Halloween*, *Pollux*, *Grease*, *The Amityville Horror*, *The Omen* and *Jaws*.

Today, even video games and television series are subject to the tie-in treatment, along with movies that have already been novelized years ago and are now being mass-marketed in all-new "extended" editions. Recent *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th* novels from Black Flame Publications feature masked maniacs Freddy and Jason in all new exploits, still doing what they do best. Universal has even joined the publishing fray with a shiny new line of stories featuring classic celluloid creeps including *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *The Mummy* and *The Wolfman* in further monstrous adventures. But just like the novelizations of yesterday, today's tie-ins can still be easily devoured in a night or two — something that has extended their appeal well beyond movie fans and collectors of cinema memorabilia.

"There are novelizations around in a wide range of genres, but they definitely seem to slant towards two groups," says Allison of the tie-ins' core audience. "One of those is men, so there are a disproportionate number of horror and sci-fi novelizations around. The other is children and young teenagers. The novelizations and spin-offs of *Buffy*, for example, are marketed to two separate groups, one of which specifically targets younger readers, and there also seem to be endless tie-ins with series such as *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*."

The collector's market for these titles should not be ignored either. While values for horror film tie-in novelizations do vary widely: many now sell for sizable amounts at conventions and auction sites such as eBay. Early photoplay editions can pull in several hundred dollars in good condition,



complete with their dust jackets and insert photos. The most desirable include *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and the rarest of the lot, *King Kong*, which includes photos of the notorious "spider pit" sequence and has sold for more than \$10,000 in recent auctions. A number of the more modern titles have become quite scarce, as well. Several *Friday the 13th* novelizations released by Signet in the late '80s now routinely sell for \$60 or more (*Part IV* is the rarest and fetches the most money). Another ultra-rare title is *Nicholas Grabowsky's* adaptation for *Halloween IV*, published by Critic's Choice in 1988, which can go for more than \$50.

Despite their appeal to collectors, these books are now primarily viewed as part of a film's merchandising campaign, so it's not surprising that they're regarded with contempt by many literary critics, who dismiss them as a vulgar form of commercial fiction, despite the fact that many of today's notable genre scribes (see sidebar) have at some point in their careers penned one or more of them. Of course, the very fact that many tie-in novels tend to be cult, B-movie, horror or sci-fi oriented, doesn't help.

"There's certainly a lot of snobishness directed at novelizations," admits Allison. "Part of that, I think, isn't because they're novelizations per se, but simply because the majority are genre novels, a type of book quite often branded 'lowbrow.' The fact that the plots and characters aren't original is often cause for further derision, though, which I think is a bit unfair as there is still a great deal of skill involved in adapting the screenplay into novel form."

While it's true that many tie-in novelizations are no literary works of art, they do exactly what they set out to do: entertain fans of the films and make money for the publishers. But if one is willing to give them a chance and is content to overlook the more hastily written efforts by authors in search of a quick buck (Michael Avallone's clumsily executed first adaptation of *Friday the 13th Part 3* comes to mind), there are some wonderful shudder-inducing excursions of terror to be discovered, stories that can easily compete with anything presented on the big screen. Case in point: Curtis Richard's well-written novelization of John Carpenter's *Halloween*, which gives Michael Myers a back story better than many of the filmed sequels.

"I think they're going to be with us for a good while to come," says Allison of novelizations. "Their heyday may have passed with the advent of home video, DVDs and all the other opportunities that we now have to see films after their original run. Yet, even now that people are starting to watch content on their laptops and handheld devices out of the home, there are still times when a book is a much more convenient form of entertainment." ■

AWARD-WINNING HORROR SCRIBE **DENNIS ETCHISON** ALSO PENNED SOME OF THE BIGGEST HORROR MOVIE TIE-IN NOVELS OF THE 1980s.

TRANSLATING TERROR

by JAMES BURRELL

Tie-in novels may be roundly dismissed by critics, but that hasn't stopped many celebrated writers from plying their craft for these releases, translating (and occasionally expanding upon) someone else's cinematic vision for the page. Established genre authors, including John Shirley, Tim Lebbon, Elizabeth Masse, Nancy Kilpatrick and Yvonne Navarro, have all written contemporary horror tie-ins. And before them, there were others, including author/bettor Dennis Etchison (*The Blood Kiss*, *Darkside*), who not only achieved acclaim for his original works, but also wrote some of the most noteworthy tie-in novels of the early '80s. His written adaptations of such films as John Carpenter's 1980 ghost story *The Fog*, the second and third entries in the *Halloween* saga and David Cronenberg's 1983 mind-bending *Videodrome* (the latter three published under the pseudonym Jack Martin) have since become highly sought after by horror fans.

"I didn't know that there was an interest in my film novelizations until about five years ago," admits Etchison, who has won multiple World Fantasy and British Fantasy Awards, and is best known for his original short fiction. "I was asked to appear at the Halloween (Returns to Haddonfield) 25th Anniversary Convention in Pasadena, and I was astonished to find out the interest that these novelizations hold."

The California native began his career writing science fiction in the early '60s while still in his teens, submitting short stories to various magazines. However, when the horror boom of the 1970s came along in the wake of films such as *The Exorcist* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and the novels of Stephen King, Etchison found a literary outlet for his increasingly dark fiction.

"I never set out to be a horror writer," he explains. "As the horror field grew, science fiction seemed to go retrograde and become more conservative. ... I found there was more artistic experimentation, more interesting material being

published under that general label of 'horror' than anywhere else."

Etchison's introduction to writing horror movie novelizations came by way of an offer from Bantam, which needed a novelization for John Carpenter's upcoming film *The Fog*, a tale of vengeful ghost pirates. The author, however, wasn't initially keen on the offer.

"I wasn't really interested in writing novelizations because you're going to be writing a story that's not your own," says Etchison. "But I had a very high opinion of Carpenter and I really wanted to meet him. I arrived while the film was in post-production...and met with John and producer Debra Hill. She told me that someone else had written a novelization, and that it was absolutely unusable. Apparently, it featured a reporter who had sex on the beach with the ghosts and all sorts of ridiculous things. So she said, 'We need something and we need it fast, because the film is set to come out soon. Would you be interested?' I agreed, a deal was arranged, and I was given exactly six weeks to do the book. They published it and it went through eight printings at Bantam and I'm told [sold] around 400,000 copies."

Carpenter and Hill subsequently approached him to work on the *Halloween* novelizations, as well as on a (juxta) script for Michael Myers' return to the series in *Halloween 4*.

Meanwhile, Etchison would encounter completely different challenges while adapting David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, a provocative thriller about a cable programmer who gets more than he bargained for when looking for new, kinky and violent content

for his TV station.

"I saw different cuts of it, was given three or four different versions of the script, and I tried to pick out the best from each," Etchison explains. "It was fascinating, but difficult to write because the story is told as experienced by the James Woods character...who, I believe, is onscreen the whole time. So, I had to write the book the same way, from one point of view. And, as with Carpenter, I had such high regard for Cronenberg that I tried to do my best and most intelligent take on the material."

And despite what many might suspect, Etchison was, in fact, not trying particularly hard to hide behind the Jack Martin pseudonym when he wrote these tie-ins.

"I had my career as Dennis Etchison, short story writer, and I wanted to keep that separate from the person writing these novelizations," Etchison explains. "It wasn't because I was ashamed in them in any way. Jack Martin was the name of a recurring character in my own fiction, such as *The Dark Country*. So, it was also sort of an in-joke for fans."



AFTER NEARLY FOUR DECADES, THE NOTORIOUS AURORA MONSTER SCENES MODEL KITS RETURN. WILL THEY TITILLATE A NEW GENERATION OF KIDS AND OFFEND A NEW GENERATION OF PARENTS?

RETRO PLASTIC NIGHTMARES

BY
JAMES BURRELL

LONG BEFORE YOU COULD WALK INTO YOUR LOCAL TOY OR COMIC SHOP AND PICK UP GRUESOMELY DETAILED COLLECTIBLES FROM McFARLANE Toys or NECA, there were Monsters Scenes model kits. Released by hobby giant Aurora Plastics Corporation in 1971, these torture scene dioramas were a monster kid's delight and a parent's nastiest nightmare. Featuring an evil mad scientist, his monstrous, man-made servant, oversized creepy creations, not to mention buxom, scantily clad figures (moulded in flesh-coloured plastic) and terrible torture devices to put them in, they were billed by Aurora as "frightening good fun."

But many parents weren't amused. In fact, the kits — marketed under the tagline "Rated X...For Excitement!" — aroused the ire of a gaggle of concerned citizens and were soon yanked. Not surprisingly, they have become rare collectibles. Originally sold for \$1.30 each for the figures and \$2.00 each for the playsets, they now fetch up to several hundred dollars apiece in mint condition.

After nearly four decades, Monster Scenes have been reissued by Moebius Models (moebiusmodels.com). Thus far, the new line consists of six releases: the diabolical "Dr. Deadly"; his brutish servant, the "Frankenstein" monster, the "Giant Insect" (looking like the result of a genetically crossed dragonfly and scorpion), a subtle and controversial "Victims" (barefoot and clad only in torn top and teeny-tiny cut-offs), as well as dioramas of Dr. Deadly's horrible torture chamber: "The Hanging Cage" (complete with working winch and pulley, a miniature brazier of red-hot coals, poker, pincers and sword) and "The Pendulum," with authentic swinging blade, plus waist and leg restraints.

The kits are available at hobby shops and from online retailers such as monstersinmotion.com for under \$30.00 each. It's a dream come true — not only for horror model collectors but also for the two hobby industry professionals who revived

the sinister models: Dennis Prince and Moebius Models head Frank Winspur.

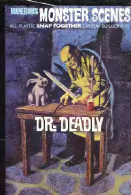
"Monster Scenes were my first monster models because they were snap-together," recalls Prince. "I was eight-years-old and my mother didn't want me sniffing glue or toxic paint. Of course the whole 'Rated X...For Excitement,' the whole kind of misogynistic thing, went right over my head. I did know that the girl victim was in trouble, and the Doctor wasn't a nice guy, though," he says, laughing.

A lifelong Aurora fan, Prince secured the rights to the Monster Scenes trademark in 2004, and has since released a variety of related merchandise, including calendars, T-shirts, magnets and (using original artwork) reproduction boxes of Aurora kits that never made it into production, all through his company Dencomm (dencomm.net).

"But what I really wanted to do was put out some kits," he says, adding that the notion of re-releasing the line was originally greeted with skepticism. "I was being told, 'No, it will never happen. You'll never sell enough of them.' [But] I knew there were legs for this project. So I did a lot of legal checking and worked with a couple of different attorneys and set about registering Monster Scenes. Then, one day, my phone rings and it's Frank Winspur on the line. He says, 'I understand you own the rights to Monster Scenes. I'd like to do model kits. Are you interested?'"

For Aurora fanatics, the story surrounding the demise of the original Monster Scenes line is the stuff of legend. They were conceived as a way to deal with dwindling sales of their groundbreaking series of 1960s classic movie monster models (that included the Frankenstein Monster, Dracula, The Wolf Man, The Mummy, Creature from the Black Lagoon, and a host of other assorted creeps — see *RM653*), which Aurora temporarily phased out in the late '60s. Reasoning that their target consumers — primarily young boys — were getting older and starting to lose interest in static models of the traditional cinematic breeds, the hobby company attempted to revitalize their product line with the creation of the more lurid, and more interactive, Monster Scenes.

Shortly after its release, though, the line was demonized by angry parent coalitions and feminist groups — most notably the National Organization for Women and Parents for Responsibility in the Toy Industry — which labelled the toys "pick" and "sadistic," even going so far as to say that children who built the models would suffer psychological



Moebius Models: Reproduction Monster Scenes boxes, (right) an old kit, and (below) promotional model for the reborn Monster Scenes.

scars. Protests were staged in front of Nabisco's corporate offices in New York (family-friendly Nabisco had recently purchased Aurora). Amid the flurry of bad publicity, Nabisco pulled the kits off store shelves. As well, several long-term Aurora employees who had worked on Monster Scenes were fired.

The kits continued to be sold in Canada for a time, however. A Giant Insect kit was released exclusively north of the border, as well as—very briefly—Dracula and Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde. Dracula was, however, later repurposed in the US for Aurora's Monster of the Movies line. (In addition, there were two other kits that were partially developed but never went into production, which Prince has released the box art for on his site: The Dungeon and The Animal Pit.)

Released in a run of 5000, each new kit includes the same features as the originals. They are produced in 1/13th scale (roughly five inches for the figures), can be snapped together without glue and come with additional movable arms and legs and bases; their modular design allows the kits to interconnect with one another. During their original release, they were perhaps the first model kits that builders could actually play with, instead of leaving them on the shelf to collect dust.

"They're pretty close to being exact," says Winspur. "There's only a very slight difference inside the kits, which happens with every reproduction kit that comes out. We have made a little bit of an improvement to make them fit better, but really, the kits themselves are nearly identical to the originals. If you look at them sitting side by side, it's very hard to tell the difference between them."

Currently, not all of the original kit designs are scheduled for re-release. These include

Marvel Comics' Vampirella (looking like a busty, pin-sized dominatrix), The Paul Parlor, with operating table, electric console panel and hanging skeleton), and Guesome Goodies, featuring an operating table, lab equipment, generator and sabre-toothed bunny rabbit!

So long after their original run, will Monster Scenes still upset people? Ironically, as Winspur explains, probably only the long-time admirers.

"I think the only people who will be upset are the ones who own the originals and are afraid the values will go down. But, just like the other Aurora kits, there are people out there who will always want the originals and will pay the money to get them."

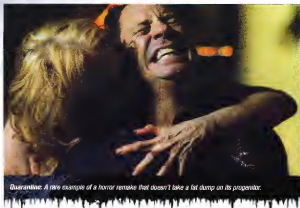
Prince doesn't see the kits as shocking either. "They're a bit goofy in a way, but still fun. It's been a fun challenge bringing these kits back for fans to enjoy. I'd be curious to know, though, if people still consider this stuff to be rated 'X'? Is this stuff still offensive, misogynistic? Personally, I don't think so."





Film, Video, Dvd & Reissues

CINEMACABRE



Quarantine: A rare example of a horror remake that doesn't take a fat dump on its progenitor.

CALL THE EXTERMINATOR!

QUARANTINE

Starring Jennifer Carpenter, Jay Hernandez and Steve Harris
Directed by John Erick Dowdle
Written by John Erick Dowdle and Drew Dowdle
Screen Gems

The next time you wait a month for the landlord to fix your water pressure, you discover mouse droppings in your cupboard or your upstairs neighbours play Rush songs on the Rock Band until four in the morning, just remember, things could be worse: your building could be infested with zombies. Lack of an undead clause in your apartment insurance aside, that's pretty shitty, but shitter yet, you could be locked inside by the authorities.

The twist on *Quarantine*'s simple premise is that the entire film is shot through the P.O.V. of a news camera. Saddled with a human interest story about firemen, Angela Vidal (*Dexter*'s Jennifer Carpenter) and her cameraman are spending a night at a firehall, when a call goes come through, they go on a ride-

along to an apartment where some sort of sickness is infecting the tenants. When a cop on the scene is attacked by one of the residents, they call for backup, only to discover that they're locked in and communication is cut off. As they try to figure out what's going on, the residents turn on each other, the sickness spreads and then the power goes out.

Oddly enough, within the last year several first-person P.O.V. zombie movies have appeared, including Romero's *Diary of the Dead*, the British film *Zombie Diaries* and, of course, the original version of *Quarantine*, [REC] by Spanish filmmakers Jaume Balagueró (*The Nameless*, *Darkness*) and Paco Plaza. Surprisingly, *Quarantine* is a rare instance in which the North American remake was released before the original. It's also a rare example of a horror remake that doesn't take a fat dump on its progenitor.

Granted, you won't see too much new here. The plot is very similar, the big scares are the same and they've already ruined the last shot of the film by putting it in the trailer (assholes!). As well, Carpenter's character is rather irritating, flipping between vapid fluff reporter, tough newswoman and stock screaming horror

movie victim. However, director/co-writer John Erick Dowdle (*The Poughkeepsie Tapes*) smartly shortens the boring firehall intro, fleshes out the cause of the disease and boosts the gore.

If you can handle relentless shaky-cam and screaming, *Quarantine* is worth a watch, even if it means dipping into your roach poison fund to see it.

Dave Alexander

TIRED OF THESE GAMES

SAW V

Starring Tobin Bell, Costas Mandylor and Scott Patterson
Written by Patrick Melton and Marcus Dunstan
Directed by David Hackl
Lionsgate

By now the formula for the *Saw* franchise is well established and understood: over-the-top gore and an overly complex storyline, punctuated by one final twist that sends the film on its severed ear and sets up the next installment. It's no longer about whether the movie is any good, so much as it is about the severity of the gore and the effectiveness of the twist. With those two points in mind, *Saw V* has to be considered the weakest franchise entry yet.

As you may recall, *Saw IV*'s final revelation was that Lieutenant Hoffman (Costas Mandylor) is involved with the Jigsaw murders. So the main story here revolves around how this came to be and how he is now trying to tie up some loose ends, namely FBI Agent Strahm (Scott Patterson), who is the only one that suspects him. You're probably expecting a comment here about a game of cat and mouse, but Strahm's investigation consists almost entirely of pulling some hard copy files on Hoffman. How exciting.

Meanwhile, a group of five individuals find themselves trapped in one of Jigsaw's experiments, à la *Saw II*, wherein they must pass a series of tests, each one resulting in a death, while they learn how each of their lives are linked to one another. There is no apparent relation between this subplot and that of Hoffman/Strahm, leaving the audience with the impression that it's only there to remind us



that this is a horror movie and to provide the bloodshed that the story otherwise lacks. On that note, these are easily the dullest deaths of the series.

Tobin Bell returns in flashbacks as the now-deceased Jigsaw to round out the running time, and eventually Strahm and Hoffman come face to face and the audience gets the big twist they've been waiting for. Though we'll save the spoilers, let's just say that the movie's tagline, "You won't believe how it ends," could be taken as "you won't believe how lame it ends."

Inevitably, next year's *Saw IV* will bring in new developments (some hinted at in this entry), which will most likely expand on the story behind the five individuals in Jigsaw/Hoffman's game. Until then, *Saw V* is little more than a underdeveloped story cobbled together from scraps of the previous entries — a forgettable cash-grab meant to squeeze a few more drops out of one of horror's biggest cash cows.

Aaron Van Lupton

CUL-A-PALOOZA

FEAST II: SLOPPY SECONDS

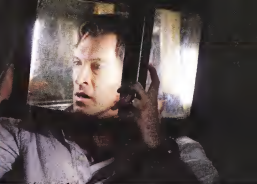
Starring Diane Goldner, Clu Gulager and Martin Kiebbra

Directed by John Gulager

Written by Patrick Melton and Marcus Dunstan
Dimension Extreme

The truth is in the tagline: "Sloppy seconds" *Feast II*, the follow-up to *Feast* — the film that came out of season three of the Ben Affleck- and Matt Damon-produced reality show *Project Greenlight* — is both as sloppy and juvenile as the tagline implies. Not that the original is *Monster Masterpiece Theatre*, but Patrick Melton and Marcus Dunstan — who wrote *Feast*, as well as *Saw IV* and *V* — seemed to have aimed this one at a *Ghoulies Gone Wild* crowd.

With the tone of a postmodern dingleberry that fell off Quentin Tarantino's balls fifteen years ago, *FII* opens with a masked midget Mexican wrestler having sex in the trailer he shares with his brother/tag-team partner. Mid-sex act, a toothy monster smashes through the window and literally tears his



Agent Strahm (Scott Patterson) struggles to free himself from a trap

average-sized partner in half. Cue little person in bloody wrestling gear running around with a massive prosthetic penis flopping in the breeze. Admittedly hilarious, but it sets the tone for the rest of a film that's generally more juvenile than clever, and rarely as hip as it wants to be.

The flashback-filled narrative is stacked with quirky characters; a bunch of 'em band together to find refuge in the local jail, which is the only safe place in town but has been taken over by a mesh addict. Not much else happens, as the anemic plot is simply there to facilitate the gore gags.

We don't learn much more about the nasty creatures, either, but do see their big nasty GWAR-like shlongs (a topic covered in one of the featurettes on the disc), and one of 'em rapes a cat. Several players from the first *Feast* return, including director John Gulager's wife Diane Goldner as the vengeful twin sister of the biker bitch killed in the original, and his dad Clu (Return of the Living Dead!), as the bartender. In fact, there are a bunch of Gulagers in the film, and maybe that's at least one Gulager over the line because *Feast II* has an abundance of characters that don't do anything.

The original *Feast* had fewer locations at its disposal, but it didn't matter because the characters were more engaging, the tone more consistent and the plot moved much quicker despite a similar running time.

On DVD soon is *Feast 3: The Happy Fetus*. If they make a fourth one, I suggest going for broke and telling it *Feast 4: The Cleveland Gulager*.

Dave Alexander

LET SLEEPING SERIES LIE

RETURN TO SLEEPAWAY CAMP

Starring Vincent Pastore, Jonathan Triersten and Paul DeAngelo

Written and directed by Robert Hiltzik
Magnolia

It's been years since talk of a new *Sleepaway Camp* movie first hit the interwebs — a film that would reunite director Robert Hiltzik with original cast members for an "official" sequel, ignoring the previous crappy installments. Now, five years after shooting eventually wrapped, the reported CGI problems have been solved and *Return to Sleepaway Camp* is finally ready. But is it worth the wait?

The answer is a resounding "no," which is a shame because on paper *Return* has a lot going for it, notably an inspired cast that includes *Soyuztots*' star Vincent Pastore as the camp owner and the late Isaac Hayes ("Chief" on *South Park*) as the camp chef, together with original stars Paul DeAngelo, Jonathan Triersten and Felissa Rose in the



www.teesfromthecrypt.com



FEAST OF FLESH

ZOMBIE STRIPPERS!

Starring Jenna Jameson, Robert Englund
and Jennifer Holland
Written and directed by Jay Lee
Columbia/Tristar



Honestly, I always do my double-dog damndest to set aside personal prejudices when reviewing new films, but sometimes it's hard, and occasionally it's harder. Hence, I was pretty much resigned to hating *Zombie Strippers!* from the get-go, purely because it's from a subgenre I wish would just fucking die already: the zombie comedy, a played-out, one-note joke that stopped being funny years ago. I could only hope (against hope) that this might be the one to change all that.

The opening sequence, in which a *Robocop*-style news feed brings us up to speed, actually shows promise: Dubya has dissolved Congress (it was "cramping his style") and is now in his fourth Presidential term, propped up by VP Schwarzenegger. The US is at war with every country in the Middle East, as well as Libya, Venezuela, France, Canada and Alaska. Given the inevitable shortage of military personnel, W Industries has developed a process to reanimate the dead, which inevitably goes awry at a top-secret facility in Sartre, Nebraska and soon infects performers and customers alike at a nearby strip club. Hilarity ensues. Well, not really, but apparently it was supposed to.

Slumming Robert Englund essentially reprises his "Masters of Horror" *Dance of the Dead* role here as scuzzy club owner Ian Esco (absurdist theatre fans, you may begin snickering now). There's also sex film starlet Jenna Jameson, the embodiment of everything I hate about prevailing trends in American porn: a bland, bleach-blonde, bogus-boobed blow-bout Barbie devoid of any discernible personality, who nonetheless rocketed to the top of the industry in the '90s simply because she was more media-savvy than most of her peers.

Still, *Zombie Strippers!* is far from the worst of its kind; Jay Lee directs with panache, there are some genuinely funny moments, performances range from adequate to very adequate and the gore effects are surprisingly good. It might well have come off as clever satire if it hadn't been done to death during the last six years or so, but let's face it, *Return of the Living Dead*, *Dead Alive* and *Shaun of the Dead* are the only zombie comedies anyone needs to see. Okay, I guess *Fido* would make the list too. But anything else is just... rotten.

John W. Bowen

memorably over-the-top roles that made them cult favourites. Hiltzik clearly wanted to make a film with fans of his original sleaze classic in mind, but in some ways that's also where he went wrong.

Set at Camp Manabe ("be a man" backwards... sort of), the movie centres around socially awkward Alan (Michael Giffney), who, like Angela Baker in the original, is a magnet for the other kids' abuse. Not surprisingly, it isn't long before one of Alan's tormentors is gruesomely dispatched, triggering still-buff Ronnie's (Paul DeAngelis) paranoia that he's got another Camp Arawak murder spree on his hands.

Return bears some obvious similarities to the original *Sleepaway*, including the kids' foul mouths and mean-beyond-belief behaviour, as well as the implausibly elaborate deaths. Hiltzik even goes so far as to redo the infamous boiling vat kitchen attack from the original. That's cool and all, but it would have been better if he actually tried to make a good movie, rather than retreat old ground. As it is, *Return to Sleepaway Camp* is awkward and unimaginative. The jokes are more cruel than funny, the kill scenes are boring and take forever to develop, and while the original had one of the greatest twist endings in movie history, the conclusion here is utterly predictable.

Making a bad movie is just no way to pay tribute to a fan favourite.

Aaron Van Lupton

SOUTHERN FRIED FUN

TRAILER PARK OF TERROR

Starring Nichole Hiltz, Jeanette Brox
and Lew Temple
Directed by Steven Goldmann
Written by Timothy Dolan
Seville

Zombie movies are kind of like jack-o'-lanterns a few days after Halloween: they're everywhere but they're not particularly fresh anymore. *Trailer Park of Terror*, though, is pretty much guaranteed to carve a smile into your face thanks to some great effects, a wicked sense of humour and a cast with actual talent.

Based on the series by Imperium Comics, it's obviously influenced by the redneck aesthetic of Rob Zombie. It begins with a prologue set in 1981 that sees "trailer park queen" Norma (Nichole Hiltz) take out the entire white-trash population of Tophet Meadows with a shotgun proffered by The Devil (country star Trace Adkins) after her regular-guy boyfriend is accidentally killed by some of her more possessive (and creepy) neighbours. There are laughs, but Norma's desperation to get out is palpable, and Hiltz makes us believe that her character would sell her soul for revenge.



Unavailable since 1964, it is the "Grail" for many toy, kit, and monster collectors (plus, it's just plain cool!). Standing at over 19 inches and featuring movable arms, this release is a faithful reproduction of the iconic kit. As with all Meotism reproduction kits, Gigantic Frankenstein ("Big Frankie" to his friends) comes in the same classic style, paper-wrapped box as he did 44 years ago!

www.monstermodels.com

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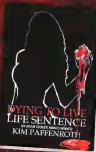


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Trailer Trash Zombie: Norma (Nichole Hiltz) loses her face



Seventeen years later, a half-dozen Bible camp rejects and their pastor seek shelter from a storm at a seemingly deserted Tophet Meadows. The only resident appears to be Norma, "alive" despite blowing herself up after her little massacre. She insists they all stay the night, and soon the supernatural stage is set for some fun and fatal set pieces courtesy of the resurrected rednecks.

Sounds pretty standard, but writer Timothy Dolan and director Steven Goldmann manage to make *Trailer Park* special by balancing easily appreciated jokes and violence (including the making of human jerky) with relatively nuanced characterization. The dynamic between the undead is especially interesting, with Norma, despite a peeling face, maintaining control over her horny, honky-tonk homies with the vaguest promises of necromantic nookie.

More superficially, *Trailer Park* boasts some kick-ass zombie makeup, including a rockabilly revenant who staples an arm back on after getting blowed up real good and a kinky Asian masseuse who gives decidedly unhappy endings. If there's any criticism, it's the film's coyness towards sex. Despite boldly trumpeting its unrated status on the box art, I've rarely seen so many couples doing it in their underclothes.

But gorehounds will be well served, and horror fans in general have a new reason to head down South.

Sean Plummer

UN-BOLL-IEVABLE!

SEED

Starring Michael Paré, Will Sanderson and Raffi Moeller
Written and directed by Uwe Boll
Vivendi

If Dr. Uwe Boll will be remembered for anything besides making jaw-droppingly sh-

ty horror films, it will be his ability to confound his critics. He's turned himself into a cottage industry of profitable derision that must surely strike envy into the hearts of Ron Jeremy and William Hung. But now he's taken it to the next level. Oh, sure, filmmaker-versus-critic boxing matches were novel (if less impressive given that Boll can actually box and must critics can't), but when you've staked your claim in the shoggeist as the director horror fans love to hate, nothing quite takes the cake for sheer audacity like making a movie that isn't terrible.

"A good Uwe Boll movie?" the Constant Reader asks, accompanied by a sharp intake of breath and rocketing of eyebrows up past the hairline at the speed of sound. Well, let's not get carried away, people. *Seed* is a bad film, but a bad film by Uwe Boll that nonetheless evidences a grasp of the craft of filmmaking. It boasts one kill scene that would make Tobe Hooper cringe (and I mean that in a good way) and, most importantly, isn't even close to the worst thing I've seen all year. Seventh sign of the freakin' Apocalypse, people. REE-PENT!

The what? "Plot?" Oh, it concerns masked serial killer Maxwell Seed, sentenced to death for 666 murders over a period of ten years. When a botched execution leaves him buried alive, he digs himself out of the grave, exacts revenge, etc., and yes, it's all pretty fucking stupid. But here's the kicker, should Boll continue to improve at this rate, by my calculations he'll make his first flit-to-middlin' film at some point between 2012 and 2014, a decent one by 2020 and a classic circa 2032. Hey, do the math—he's only 43-years-old as I write this. Oy vey, I should live so long. Need



perspective? *Seed* is significantly better than Rob Zombie's *Halloween* remake, most of Ulli Lommel's fact-based serial killer movies and anything I've ever seen by Rob Cohen, Chris Fisher or Jess Franco. A bad film, sure, but I've officially seen worse. Congratulations, Dr. Boll. Keep up the good work.

John W. Bowen

LOCAL YOKELS ANYONE?

SCARCE

Starring Jesse T. Cook, John Geddes and Steve Warren
Written and directed by Jesse T. Cook and John Geddes
Anchor Bay

For all of its problems, there's an inspiring story behind *Scarce*'s release. The movie was independently produced, written and directed by Jesse T. Cook and John Geddes, two aspiring filmmakers from Collingwood, Ontario, who flew to the Cannes Film Festival with a reel of scenes from *Scarce* and sold the film to Anchor Bay. Condensed into a trailer for distribution companies, *Scarce* would look impressive. The wilderness location is well chosen, the gore effects are quite effective and the Super-16mm cinematography looks incredible. But, sadly, any time that the characters open their mouths all the work of a talented crew goes to waste.

The movie opens with three friends enjoying a weekend of snowboarding for no reason other than the fact that the filmmakers had access to the equipment and location. One poorly staged party scene later, they're lost on a lonely highway and decide to pull over at a creepy diner and ask for directions, without a hint of irony. The directions don't work out (who would have seen that coming?) and the guys end up at the mercy of cannibalistic hillbillies.

Steve Warren and the rest of the creepy "coastal folk" actors look born to play their roles, but sadly they also lack the skill to deliver dialogue without sounding like monotone robots. Writer/directors Cook and Geddes also elected to play two of the hapless victims themselves, which was a poor decision because while they lack the skill to make their convoluted dialogue work, they have the conviction to force it out of their mouths anyway.

It should be noted that for a \$400,000 production, the film looks professional. The cinematography transforms a winter wonderland into terrifying wasteland, the makeup department created some disgustingly realistic gore



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2007-08-01





OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED THIS ISSUE: LANCE WEATHERS THE WORST BIG HAIRY DEAL

SUBURBAN SASQUATCH

Brain Damage Films

Wow, my 50th column! Apparently time flies when you're watching shitty movies. As you might imagine, I'm often asked what the worst movie I've ever seen is, so I thought I'd choose three of the very worst... starting with *Suburban Sasquatch*. When a Sasquatch – a.k.a. a guy in an ape suit and a pair of fuzzy slippers – attacks the residents of a small town, it's up to a dumb reporter, a round cop and a hot Native American woman armed with a set of magical arrowheads to stop the CGI bloodshed. The film is rife with horribly looped sound effects and sets made out of plastic garbage bags; if you get past the first three minutes of this sick flick, you'll understand why it's on this list.

Body Count: 18

Ultimate Lamentation: Bigfoot bench-presses a 2-D police cruiser



PULLING A BOWER

SKELETON MAN

No Image

Editors are often the unsung heroes of a film, saving a movie during post-production. Not so for *Skeleton Man*. I thought it would be half-decent because it stars Michael Rooker (*Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, *Swifty*) and Casper Van Dien (*Starship Troopers*, *Sleepy Hollow*), as two Special Forces soldiers hunting down a supernatural creature that's carving up the countryside. Unfortunately, there isn't a lead actor good enough or a body count high enough to save this sucker. The creature's costume and the horse it rides around on continually change, as does the makeup on the main characters. There's even an entire battle scene from a different movie! You might enjoy it if you suffer from ADD, otherwise consider yourself warned.

Body Count: 54

Ultimate Lamentation: Helicopter shot down with a single arrow



FUN-SUCKERS

THE MALIBU BEACH VAMPIRES

BCI

Back in 1991, director Francis Patrick Creighton took a stab at political satire via the vampire. Focusing on headlines from the late '80s, the film features characters based on the disgraced Reverend Jim Bakker and his mascara-monster wife Tammy Faye, Colonel Oliver North and an unfaithful US Congressman. Each one of them encounters a group of female vampires who aren't like any bloodsuckers that we've ever seen before. Not only do they not drink blood, they're actually from outer space, have horribly ill-fitting fangs and dance on the beach in the sun to the theme from *Beach Blanket Bingo*. Plus, when they bite someone they inject their victims with a truth serum so that they have to tell the truth or die. Need I say more?

Body Count: 0

Ultimate Lamentation: Agonizingly long cripple tap dance



Last Chance Lance

and the dungeon sets look appropriately disturbing. Unfortunately, all these efforts were put into a screenplay that's little more than a collection of scenes blatantly stolen from everything from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* to *Halloween*. It's always nice to see a Canadian film secure such distribution, but it's unfortunate some of them are just so disposable.

Philip Brown

SSSSSSSSSHIT

VIPERS

Starring Tara Reid, Jonathan Scarfe

and Corbin Bernsen

Directed by Bill Corcoran

Written by Brian Kalkin

Paramount

Anacconda stars Jennifer Lopez. *Vipers* stars Tara Reid – make of that what you will when placing the latter in the canon of deadly snake movies.

Vipers, an original movie made for The Sci-Fi Channel, stars the blonde media train wreck as a small-town florist caught in the middle of a corporate genetic-engineering project that has jumped the rails. It seems that friendly SinisterCorp. run by the seemingly singularly named Burton (Corbin Bernsen), has been tampering with God's fine work in the viper, attempting to boost venom production for use in medical research. In a plot development stolen hundreds of times since *Alien* was released, it seems that some of the company's officers are more interested in the weapons industry potential of the snakes' venom and create a line of hyper-aggressive, super-poisonous snakes. Cue lab accident and we've got ourselves a B-movie.

The rest of the story is standard nature-run-amok fare, by which I mean it's essentially a *Jaws* redux. (God, is there only one plot in the world that has to do with killer animals?) The snakes make their way into a peaceful community, which overcomes its internal problems (with the help of a charismatic outsider) to work together, forge new relationships and blow up snakes.

I can't even recommend the movie for being terrible. Bernsen and Jessica Sien are solid, and the CGI snakes don't look entirely ridiculous, but it's just not good or bad enough to be really entertaining.

The *Vipers* DVD comes in a slipcover that features a giant snake descending upon Tara Reid in what could easily be mistaken for jungle. Go figure, the vipers in this movie are only slightly bigger than real vipers, and the action takes place in the Pacific Northwest. If you're going to let yourself get duped by DVD cover art, you deserve this movie. But if you really want giant snakes and mediocre actresses, just go watch *Anacconda* again. You're not this stupid.

Jason Lapeyre



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RUE MORGUE

GETS A PIECE WITH
A LEERING GLANCE
AT THE LATEST IN
HORROR PORN.

A HARD-ON FOR HORROR

BY LAST CHANCE LANCE

IT'S NO SECRET THAT HORROR HAS A RATHER DISPROPORTIONATE AMOUNT OF sex and nudity in it. Slasher movies, cheese-cake vampire films, nunsploitation, Nazi-sploration, torture porn and a glut of indie terror features have helped forge a strong bond between boobs 'n' blood over the years. But as steamy as the sex scenes get, the films generally stay away from full-frontal male nudity and any kind of visible sexual penetration. But there is a

never subgenre that doesn't shy away from penetration of both the weapon and penis variety.

The Urban Dictionary defines horror-porn as "a film genre that combines the techniques of both horror films and porn films to create a total base cinematic experience." To prove just how base your cinematic experience can be, we have gathered five recent horror-porn features for your sticky consideration.

KISS ATTACK

Starring April Flores, Sasha Grey and La Chollita
Written and directed by Carlos Batts
Adam and Eve Pictures

The failure of most pornos is that they try to pretend that they're dramatic movies with real dramatic actors. *Kiss Attack* is a prime example of this; it attempts to dress itself up as an overly ambitious vampire film.

The opening titles suggest that what we are about to see is the story of Vlad Drakul, a master vampire from outer space who has left a trail of decimated planets in his wake and has now set his sights on Earth. He has planted five of his sexy vampire offspring on our planet and has enlisted the help of an evil alchemist named Mr. Experiment, who has created a line of cosmetics and perfumes to kiss his daughters of evil seduce, fuck and kill men and women to death.

What we actually get is 90 minutes of overly ambitious porn set mostly in a garage. It's rife with sexy fetish costuming, some lame-ass martial arts action and a couple of dance numbers by actresses who are nearly bursting out of their corsets. Luckily though, there is some creative comic book art animation by Nathan Carlisle interspersed throughout the movie and featured in a mini comic book that comes with the DVD.

Playing out like a graphic novel on *Vlad*, the plotline is so convoluted and the fright factor is so non-existent that it's best to forget about it all and just focus on the sex.

AMATEUR PORN STAR KILLER

Starring Shane Ryan, Michiko Jimenez
and Jan Gould
Directed by Shane Ryan
Written by Shane Ryan and Michiko Jimenez
Cinema Epoch

Shot entirely on a hand-held video camera, mostly from a first-person perspective, this one follows Brandon, a teenager who enjoys picking up

girls and taking them to hotel rooms for sex—quite a hobby!

While driving through the city he picks up a young girl and takes her back to his room and for more than half of the film we are forced to listen to their awkward conversation until he finally talks her into undressing and they proceed to have awkward sex. He then tries to suffocate her with a pillow, and when that doesn't work he beats her to death (off camera) with his fists.

If this film was trying to shock or pay homage to its voyeuristic or pseudo-sleazebag roots, it fails. It also fails as porn because the sex scenes are murky and completely uninteresting. In fact, the scariest thing about the whole film is the quality of the picture, which is horrible at best. Not only is it shakier and choppy than *The Blair Witch Project*



but it's been aged, scratched and grungified – and inexplicably changes from black and white to colour. It would have been much more effective and ultimately scarier if it had been left in its original video format and presented as “found evidence” of a horrifying crime.

THE WICKED

Starring Kayli Lei, Stormy Daniels
and Miyaly Mendez
Written and directed by Michael Raven
Wicked Pictures

When a group of hot ‘n’ horny twentysomethings head out into the desert for a weekend concert, their lives get turned upside down after they pick up a couple of scary hitchhikers who call themselves Baby and Ods (yes – it’s a very fucking obvious homage to Baby and Ods from the Rob Zombie flicks). But when they arrive at their destination they’re all in for a big surprise, as a nest of sexy vampires shows up to feast on them.



Right off the bat the one thing that sets this porn apart from others of its ilk is that it has some pretty high production values. It’s very well shot and makes use of some great outdoor sets in the desert, and, unlike a lot of other horror pornos, this one boasts plenty of spurting blood and features porn actors, the performances – outside of the bedroom anyhow – are pretty limp (pun very intended).

What’s also scary is that this is a condom-only porn, which means that anytime there’s actual vaginal penetration a condom is used, which may not sit well with a lot of porn enthusiasts who want the sexual fantasy element. But hey, this is the real world and the threat of an STD is one of the scariest things out there!

THIS AIN'T THE MONSTERS XXX

Starring Aiden Stein, Evan Stone
and Jenna Haze
Written and directed by Arlen Snyder
Hustler Video

In the horror genre there are some things you just don’t, ahem, fuck with, and as far as I’m concerned *The Monsters* is one of them! Like *The Addams Family*, *The Monsters* helped introduce a generation of kids to horror and holds a special place in our hearts. So when a copy of this parody showed up, I’ll admit that I was furious yet curious at the same time.



With cheap-ass sets attempting to look like the beloved house at 1313 Mockingbird Lane and a cast trying desperately hard to portray their original counterparts, this definitely ain’t *The Monsters*. The bats and the jazz are flying right from the start,

as the film opens up with an unbelievably long female masturbation scene in Grandpa’s laboratory. From there it quickly spirals down the toilet as “Herman” decides to surprise Lily on

their wedding anniversary by having a monster cock grafted onto his body to replace his own.

The only thing that this insipid bastardization has going for it is that there are a ton of sex scenes, including an erotic cemetery romp, a not-so-shy “Marilyn” screwing her strangely male boyfriend and “Eddie,” who is now a brooding rock star, making a sex tape with two hot groupies.

Available to view in both colour or black and white – this is one of those DVDs that really has to be seen to be believed, but then I suggest that you relegate it to coaster status as soon as possible, as not to further sully your fond memory of the real *Monsters*.

NIGHT OF THE GIVING HEAD

Starring Caroline Pierce, Rucca Paige
and Kyles Reese
Written and directed by Rodney Moore
Rodney Moore

Folks, I can sum this sucker up with two words: sperm zombies! If that doesn’t have you hooked right away, then you must be frigid, impotent or already dead.



Sperma-rays from a passing comet have infected the entire female population, causing them to stumble around and feed on the sperm of any passing man. And even though that doesn’t sound like a bad thing, a group of scientists has determined that

the only way to neutralize these ferocious sperm zombies is to – I shit you not – squirt whipped cream in their mouths, which then turns them into lascivious lesbians! I couldn’t make this stuff up if I tried. And trust me, I’ve tried!

Obviously meant to be more funny than scary, this is a hilarious parody of the George A. Romero classic that might be light on horror but is definitely heavy on the head-giving. It also features a totally rocking surfabilly soundtrack and more naked girls wandering around moaning “moore cacoock!” than you can shake a double-ended dildo at.

Night of the Giving Head is the kind of film that most teenage male-horror fans dreamed of either making or starring in, and it definitely gives a whole new meaning to the term “splatter movie!”

Dead Scribe: Miyaly Mendez, Stormy Daniels, and Kyles Reese in *This Ain't the Monsters XXX* (over up to its title).



CINEMACABRE
PRESENTS

Indie and D.I.Y. films reviewed

Blood on A Budget

Reviews by Philip Brown, Last Chance Lance and Aaron Von Lupton

Attitude for Destruction

myspace.com/attitudefordestruction

With the exception of a few favourites — *Phantom of the Paradise*, *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*, *Hard Rock Zombies*, and *Black Roses* — there's only a handful of rock band horror movies. Filmmaker Ford Austin (*Gothic Vampires From Hell*, *The Curse of Lizzie Borden*) aims to add to that electric canon.

Attitude for Destruction centres on Hollywood *Roses*, fronted by charismatic singer Drake (Colby Vell), a very Sunset Strip rock band that's just scored a record deal. But there's a catch! The label doesn't want Drake, so his tame-hungry bandmates sign without him. The ensuing fight sees Drake accidentally killed by the others, who bury him in an abandoned building. A year later, Drake returns to exact revenge.

Fans of bands like Guns N' *Roses* or L.A. Guns will love the film's excellent music, as Vell and Burzynski are given plenty of opportunities to strut their stuff onstage. Even prolific indie horror actor Jed Rowen, as scumbag manager J.J., plays some mean blues in an inspired scene.

The film really delivers the goods, though, which is both goofy and plentiful. Topless hotties devour human hearts, drumsticks are shoved through eye sockets and a girl loses her head... while gung head. Good for gorehounds and metalheads alike. **LCL**

Slayer

slayer-movie.com

Within minutes it's clear that *Slayer* is an over-ambitious student film made by a group of genre-loving college roommates. Shot on not-so-high-end digital video, it looks like a home movie hastily compiled over a summer. Director Ed Peduzzi has clearly seen enough horror and anime to know how to frame a "shot" and cut together a gory action sequence, but any stylistic talents he might have are hampered by the glancing technical limitations of his production. It also doesn't help that he can't tell a clear story or create remotely realistic characters.

Slayer centres around a college student who inadvertently witnesses a murder and soon finds



Slayer

himself drafted into a team of samurai vampire hunters (don't ask). All of the characters are played by twentysomethings, which is distracting when some claim to have killed vampires since the '70s!

A few sequences are visually striking (particularly the animated montage) but without a solid story to connect them, they're little more than eye candy. With a decent budget and a coherent script there's a chance that Peduzzi could create an entertaining comic book action movie in the vein of *Versus*. *Slayer*, however, amounts to little more than an amateur experiment in feature-length filmmaking. **PB**

Am I Evil

amievilmovie.com

Am I Evil is an ultra-low-budget splatterfest sporting a solid concept: a slasher film from the perspective of the killer. With superior amateur performances overall, impressive gore effects that will cause even hardened horror hounds to look away, and a score (by former *AM* contributor Chris

Alexander) that is deep, dark and rife with atmosphere, filmmaker Richard Tomas shows he can do a lot with a little. Unfortunately, he doesn't seem to know what to do with a good idea.

Mark Vazquez plays Andrew Lakewood, a neighborhood psycho who's more human than your typical horror movie megalomaniac in that he lets the audience in on his thoughts. He realizes he's doing wrong but feels no remorse. Okay, cool, but *Am I Evil* would have been more meaningful if it had explained what drives Andrew to rape, torture and kill. As it is, he's just a hunky, good-guy-next-door type who murders folks. It's a convincing performance by Vazquez, but not a convincing look at what makes the serial killer tick. But hey, the fact that we would even have this kind of conversation over a movie made for a few thousand dollars is proof that *Am I Evil* does better than most for next to nothing. **AVL**



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REISSUES

weeks). It's an all-too-brief look at an iconic Canadian show that was a touchstone for so many monster kids.

Sean Plummer

FRANCO FAKER

CANNIBAL TERROR (1981)

Starring Olivier Mathot, Silvia Solar and Gérard Lemaire
Directed by Alain Deruelle
Written by H.L. Rastaine
Severin



French production company Eurociné is notable, if not laudable, for a handful of mediocre exploitation films made in the late '70s and early '80s, among them the Italian cannibal genre cash-ins helmed by Jess Franco: *Devil Hunter* and *Cannibals* (RMR75). The latter, as well as this film, are notorious solely as a result of being pegged "video nasties" by the British Department of Public Prosecutions in the '80s.

Cannibal Terror stars silver-haired Franco vet Olivier Mathot as a wealthy businessman whose young daughter is kidnapped by a gang of inept criminals. They hide out in the cabin of an accomplice in an unspecified jungle after delivering their ransom demand, but are forced to flee into "cannibal country" after one rapes their benefactor's wife and she rats them out for revenge. Mathot's character follows with a rescue party of poorly armed mercenaries who are well past their physical prime.

It's not clear what rankled British censors. It couldn't have been sex; the rape scene is unconvincing and nudity is restricted to a character taking a bath. Maybe it was the cheap but satirically disgusting gore sequences, which consist of white guys in bad war paint scooping the guts out of a pig carcass wrapped in clothing. Unfortunately, these scenes are few, as the bulk of the film sees the cast milling about in the Spanish wood or "natives" half-heartedly shuffling in front of a campfire while their continuity challenged chief gesticulates in front of a shabby bamboo wall adorned with plastic skulls.

Because of similarities to *Cannibals*, this film has erroneously been credited to Franco. In a six-minute interview included as an Easter egg (cycle through the options on the main menu until a campfire appears beside the title), he addresses his involvement in this film and another Eurociné spectacle, *Zombie Lake* (by Jean Rollin). Franco claims to have written the script and allowed director Alain Deruelle (credited as Alan W. Steeve) to piggyback his film on the production of *Cannibals* by shooting exterior footage at the same time, hence the confusion.



The Hilarious House of Frightenstein: Billy Van as Count Frigboenstein's Wolfman.

VAN OF THE HOUR

THE HILARIOUS HOUSE OF FRIGHTENSTEIN.

GORY GORY TRANSYLVANIA (1971)

Starring Billy Van, Fishka Rais and Vincent Price
Written and directed by Ruff Markowitz
Anchor Bay

Nostalgia is powerful, which is why the release of *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein: Gory Gory Transylvania* brings joyful tears to these bloodshot eyes and kindles warmth in this blackened heart.

For those not in the know (or who haven't read the RMR62 cover story), *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein* was a brilliant, largely improvised Canadian TV show for kids produced in Hamilton, Ontario in 1971 and aired on various networks over the following 25 years. It starred veteran Canadian performer Billy Van as Count Frigboenstein, a self-aggrandizing but clueless vampire whose mission is to make Brucie, his Frankenstein monster proxy, live again so that he may "once again return to that most gorgeous of homelands..." Transylvania. Aiding him in his endeavours is his eternally put-upon, green-skinned servant Igor (Fishka Rais). Vincent Price was the celebrity hook, providing the show's bookend

monologues and introducing its many characters (played by Van, mostly) with mainly clever rhymes.

This monster kid has vivid memories of waking up around dawn in the early '70s and tiptoeing downstairs to watch *Frightenstein* before his parents woke up. It was a staple of many Canadian kids' youth, and the release of Volume One (by Critical Mass) early last year was a nightmare come true for those of us who grew up with Grizelda, The Wolfman, The Librarian, Bwana Clyde Batty, Gronk and all the other inhabitants of Castle Frightenstein. Watching it as an adult, the humour stood up, and the cast's improvisational spirit made rediscovering it a pleasure.

But the set did not sell particularly well, which made hopes of a second volume as dim as Frightenstein's castle lights. Fortunately, Anchor Bay stepped in to distribute nine more full-length episodes on this three-disc set. In addition, they've included interior artwork courtesy *Rue Morgue's* Number One *Frightenstein* Fan, art director Gary Pullin(!), plus the *Return to Transylvania* featurette, which includes an interview with Van, who died in 2003. He shares mostly fond memories of his time on the show and even delivers some monologues in character, but also talks about the difficulties of performing in makeup (each character's sketches were filmed separately over the course of



Enthusiastic aficionados will be pleased to find a spiffy hi-def anamorphic transfer; other extras are limited to one deleted scene, a theatrical trailer and the aforementioned hidden clip

The Gore-met

ANOTHER BRUCIE...

SUNDOWN: THE VAMPIRE IN RETREAT (1990)

Starring David Caradine, Bruce Campbell and M. Emmet Walsh
Directed by Anthony Hickox
Written by John Burgess and Anthony Hickox
Lionsgate

Originally released (and ultimately ignored) theatrically in 1990, *Sundown: The Vampire in Retreat* finds two vampire clans at war over synthesized blood in that rarest of horror genres: the vampire western comedy!

In the dusty, remote town of Purgatory, Count Margulak (David Caradine) leads a commune of neck-nosers learning to exist among the living. Sun Jammers, SPF 100 and gaudy sombreros can only do so much, though, and thus their Great White Hope lies in David Harrison (Jim Metzler), a chemical engineer with the blueprint to a machine that will end their hunger. Through the mass production of a synthetic blood substitute, the gang's hope to shed the fangs seems nigh. That is until a rebel group, led by Ethan Jefferson (John Ireland, *Day of the Nightmare*, *Spartacus*), rejects the distasteful man-made plasma in favour of fortified wooden bullets.

The battle for the "right to bite" spills out into the streets, dragging Harrison and his family into a secret world they never bargained for, further complicated by the arrival of Van Helsing's great-grandson (played by a deliciously overwrought Bruce Campbell).

Full of stop-motion claymation effects, purposeful tongue-in-cheek '80s cheese and a sweeping western score, *Sundown* is an odd gem that will undoubtedly find a new following on DVD. Arguably, this is the first movie to have introduced gunplay into a vampire film with a good old-fashioned desert shoot-'em-up.



David Caradine as the slepper Count Margulak

The arterial action brings more laughs than scares, but, with all the rules of the vampire world in tact, should still be considered essential viewing for the suck-ahs in all of us. Fans of Campbell should consider this a must-own piece of their collection too, as it's the first movie he starred in after *Evil Dead II*, and it finds him relishing in the same classic over-the-top mugging.

To that end, the disc also features lengthy, recent interviews with Caradine, Campbell and renowned character actor M. Emmet Walsh (*Blade Runner*, *Critters*) as they reflect upon the shoot and the movie's uncanny lack of notoriety.

Trevor Tuminski

WEIRD, WEIRD SCIENCE

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR (1981)

Starring Michael Murphy, Louis Fletcher and Dan Shor
Directed by Michael Laughlin
Written by Bill Condon and Michael Laughlin
Elite

Yup, 1981 was a great year for genre fans, who could visit their local multiplex to see films such as *Friday the 13th Part 2*, *An American Werewolf in London* or *The Evil Dead*. With great movies like that, it's easy to understand how *Strange Behavior* could get lost in the shuffle.



Having the dubious distinction of being the very first horror film ever shot in New Zealand, *Strange Behavior* (a.k.a. *Dead Kids*) features an almost entirely American cast and is set in a small Illinois town where local teenagers are turning up dead and mutilated after vicious knife attacks.

The town's top cop, played brilliantly by character actor Michael Murphy (*Shocker*), follows the rising body count to the science department of the local university. Here, he discovers that a sexy mad scientist, played by British über-babe Fiona Lewis (*Dr Phibes Rises Again*), is brainwashing students to murder the offspring of her enemies. Also appearing in a completely underrated role is Louise Fletcher, who won an Academy Award for her portrayal of evil Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and who is successfully cast against type as the caring love interest to the town's sheriff.

Elite has taken much care with this reissue, presenting a crisp transfer with an excellent mono soundtrack featuring original music by Tangerine Dream. Also included are some interesting trailers, deleted scenes, an extensive photo gallery and a wonderful commentary track with co-writer Bill Condon (*Gods and Monsters*) and several of the actors.

It's quirky, funny and boasts solid performances and some good gore. *Strange Behavior* also proves to be an original take on the slasher genre, which should make it a welcome addition to any collection of '80s horror films.

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BY THE DORK-MET

BCI ECLIPSE HAS RENAMED ITS BUDGET-PRICED "Welcome to the Grindhouse" series "Exploitation Cinema." Other than a slight reworking of the cover art and the addition of some animated menu options, these discs are exactly the same. Each one contains two transfers of vintage film prints and a half-dozen related trailers you might

have seen on 42nd Street back in the day. Watch everything individually, or to completely relive the legendary theatrical experience of yore, select the "Grindhouse Experience" option and sit back for an introduction, three trailers, the first feature, a concession stand advertisement, another three trailers and the second feature. Spilled soda, burnt popcorn and cigarette smoke not included.

MAUSOLEUM (1983) BLOOD SONG (1983)

Mausoleum stars the scream queen who almost was, the lovely Bobbie Bresee (*Surf Nazis Must Die*, *Evil Spawns*), as Susan, a member of the cursed Nomed family (hail) whose firstborn daughters are doomed to be possessed by an ancient, sexually rapacious demon on their 30th birthdays, a fate that befell her own mother. It's left to her psychiatrist (Norman Burton) to free Susan from the curse.

This unfairly maligned slice of '80s cheese is famous for Bresee's "demon fits" gag, in which her breasts are replaced by chomping gargoyles. The righteous prosthetic makeup effects are courtesy of John Carl Buechler, who went on to provide effects for *From Beyond* and *Hatchet*, and direct *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood*, among others. LaWanda Page, best known as Aunt Esther in *Sanford and Son*, cameos as a housekeeper and steals nearly every scene she's in, literally running out of the film exclaiming, "No more grievin', I'm leavin'!" *Mausoleum* features a non-anamorphic film transfer

matted to an aspect ratio of 1.85:1, and has a commentary track by Bresee and Lee Christian buried in the options.

Blood Song is a formulaic but loopy slasher built on what is surely the most tenuous "psychic link" ever, in a bog-standard prologue set in 1955, a young boy watches his father shoot his mother and her lover in bed before eating a bullet himself. The devastated child reacts by tootling a lullaby on a handmade flute. Twenty-seven years later, the mentally scarred man (played by former teen heart-throb Frankie Avalon) escapes from an asylum, flute in hand, and embarks on a killing spree. His crimes are psychically witnessed by a high school student (Donna Wilkes) who received a transfusion of his blood after being in a car accident with her abusive alcoholic father (Richard Jaeckel). Not even her doting boyfriend believes her visions are real until Avalon arrives in her small town and begins stalking her, and a dismembered body turns up in a dumpster.

This film suffers from a meagre body count and has a TV movie-of-week vibe betrayed only

by some cool hatchet gore and a pair of bare boobies. Strong performances from Wilkes, Avalon and Jaeckel, as well as the Oregon mountain location and a thrilling sawmill climax, save it from the woodpile. *Blood Song* is sourced from a soft, full-frame master video and is only of interest to slasher film completists.

CEMETERY GIRLS (1972) VAMPIRE HOOKERS (1978)

Cemetery Girls is the buried treasure of the lot. Forget the alternate title, this is actually a compiled anamorphic widescreen presentation of the uncult English-language version of Javier Aguirre's *El gran amor del conde Dracula*, previously released as *Count Dracula's Great Love* on one of those abysmal Elvira's Movie Macabre discs. While the transfer, which comes from at least two sources, is not up to the standard of the Paul Naschy films BCI Eclipse previously released through its Demos label, this is nevertheless the best version currently available on DVD. It's a bittersweet treat for Naschy fans, however, since this version is dubbed, and as the Spanish-language release of Naschy's *Vengeance of the Zombies* proves, there is often a better film lurking in the original language.



Naschy wrote the screenplay and essentially transposed a script he'd written for his previous film, *Werewolf Shadow*, into a vampire story set in the 1800s. In the opening scene, two workmen deliver a coffin to a remote castle. For their troubles, one is turned into a vampire and the other takes an axe to the face. Naschy regular Vic Winer and four young beauties end up in the castle as guests of Dr. Wendell Marlow (Naschy) after their stagecoach loses a wheel and the driver is trampled to death by one of the horses. Before long, the undead workman has transformed four of the party into vampires, while the



fifth is spared by Dracula (Naschy again), as only her true love can release him from his curse. The bare breasts, blood and gothic atmosphere that distinguish Naschy films are nearly undone by flat dubbing and a confusing voice-over that seems to serve as both the film's narration and Dracula's telepathically projected voice. Argh!

Vampire Hookers, a horror comedy made by prolific Filipino producer/director Cino H. Santago (*Caged Fury*, *Nem Angels*), is also known as *Cemetery Girls*. In it, two sailors (Bruce Fairbairn and Trey Wilson) on shore leave in Manila drink and fight while trying to score a little action. After several unsuccessful attempts (including a run-in with a transsexual), a cable hooks them up with a gorgeous bar girl who lures them to a graveyard to get it on. She's one of a quartet of vampires, led by Shakespeare-sounding Richmond Reed (John Carradine), who live in a secret lair beneath a mausoleum and sip blood laced with vodka, for flavour. One of the sailors is locked in the lair and must sexually satisfy the female vamps before they drain him for good, while the other tries to convince his superior officers and local authorities that his buddy is more than AWOL.



Star Box: Mausoleum, (below) John Carradine in *Vampire Hookers*, and (opposite) Paul Naschy in *Cemetery Girls*

This film is as limp as the agonizingly long orgy scene. Filipino actor Vic Diaz is the human guardian of the vampires and longs to be one, biding his time practicing rearing from crosses in front of a mirror. And he fails. A lot.

SATAN'S SLAVE (1976) TERROR (1978)

This disc contains two films by the poor man's Pete Walker, British director Norman J. Warren, both of which were written by David McGillivray, who penned the Walker classics *Frightmare* and *Schock*.

Satan's Slave stars brunette stunner Candace Glendenning as Catherine, a young girl who accompanies her parents on a week-long visit to the country estate of relatives she's never met. Their car crashes into a tree upon arrival and bursts into flames after Catherine gets out, killing her parents. Kindly Uncle Alexander (wainut-mustachioed Michael Gough) and his handsome son

Steven (Michael Potter) insist she stay with them until she recovers from the shock. After Catherine falls in love with her first cousin(!), it's revealed that she is the direct descendant of a powerful witch and will be sacrificed in order to resurrect the woman.

This satanic potboiler features an exquisite location, frequent gratuitous nude scenes and moments of right nastiness that include a head mashed in a doorway, a gory suicide and a gnarly eyeball stabbing. Bam!

Terror starts off with a bang. A mob of medieval villagers chases a witch through the woods and attempts to burn her at the stake, but she conjures the forces of Satan and escapes her fiery fate to take revenge on the noblewoman overseeing her execution, pronouncing a curse upon her descendants before beheading her. This is revealed to be the end of a film being screened at a wrap party in the very same house seen in the movie's climax. The director claims this is a notorious incident from his family history. While they drink, a cousin he'd met only a week before is hypnotized as part of a party gag, then attacks him with a sword before being snapped out of her trance. After the party breaks up, an actress is chased through the woods by an unseen assailant and impaled to a tree, which starts a string of poorly stylized murders that doesn't relent until Warren runs out of cast members.

Any audience goodwill worked up with *Satan's Slave* is squandered with this flimsily plotted rip-off of the murder set pieces that distinguished Argento's *Deep Red* and *Suspicion*. At least Warren's films look as good as the birds in them — both are sourced from excellent prints and are enhanced for 16x9 televisions. **B**





VINTAGE HORROR REISSUES

CINÉMARQUEE

MOTHER MAY I?

PSYCHO (1960)

Starring Anthony Perkins, Janet Leigh

and Vera Miles

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock

Written by Joseph Stefano

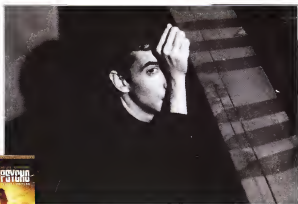
Universal

The forerunner to the modern horror film, Alfred Hitchcock's low-budget black and white *Psycho* is surely one of the most analyzed and influential films in motion picture history. Based on a lurid 1959 pulp novel by prolific author Robert Bloch—which in turn was loosely based on the murderous deeds of real-life Plainfield, Wisconsin psychopath, Ed Gein—the movie was initially met with contempt and harsh critical response. "A blot on an honorable career," quipped Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times*. Despite this, the movie became a smash hit with audiences worldwide, and its anti-hero—a mild-mannered motel owner with a dual personality and a penchant for dressing up as his mother while he kills—would become one of the screen's most iconic villains.

Self-funded, as distributor Paramount was against the project and would not grant Hitchcock the budget he asked for, *Psycho* was shot on the (then) for-rental Universal lot using the crew from his television show *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. The director's decision to hire screenwriter Joseph Stefano to adapt Bloch's story was key to the film's success, and in Stefano's hands several elements of Bloch's novel were enhanced, most notably transforming Norman Bates from an unattractive middle-aged alcoholic to an amiable, boy-next-door type.

Janet Leigh was cast as embezzling secretary Marion Crane, who meets her doom during the iconic "shower scene." Hitchcock correctly surmised that audiences would be taken off guard by her sudden, early departure in the film.

The director also wisely chose 27-year-old Anthony Perkins to star as the troubled Norman Bates, and the actor delivered what is considered one of cinema's most complex and nuanced performances. Norman Bates may be unhinged, capable of committing the



Anthony Perkins as the ultimate man with mother issues: Norman Bates

most heinous of crimes, but he's also very sympathetic. So successful was Perkins' portrayal that he suffered from typecasting thereafter, and eventually went back to the role that brought him international fame by making three sequels two decades later, even directing *Psycho III* in 1986.

Psycho was truly groundbreaking—prior to it audiences had never witnessed such titillation, voyeurism and violence in a mainstream Hollywood film. Hitchcock turned the male viewer into a "peeping Tom," most noticeably with the opening shot that peers into a hotel room being used by Marion and her boyfriend Sam Loomis (John Gavin), and later when Norman removes a painting of *The Rape of Lucretia* from the wall in his parlor to spy on Marion while she undresses. The shower murder is itself comparable to a rape scene. If Norman was unable to have sex with Marion, he has his release as "Mother"—his phallic butcher knife penetrating the woman with repeated thrusts. Hitchcock turned *Psycho* into a meditation on the very nature of horror film spectatorship.

As part of its Legacy series, Universal has released *Psycho* in a beautifully restored anamorphic widescreen DVD. Exhaustive extras on this two-disc special edition include an audio commentary with Hitchcock historian Stephen Rebello, designer Saul Bass' sto-

ryboards for the shower scene, a previously released 90-minute documentary featuring Leigh, Stefano, assistant director Hifton Green and Clive Barker, the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* television series episode "Lamb to the Slaughter" and more archival material. There's also the newly produced featurette, *In the Master's Shadow—Hitchcock's Legacy*, in which John Carpenter, Guillermo Del Toro, William Friedkin, Martin Scorsese, Eli Roth and others describe how Hitchcock's films influenced them. Of particular interest, however, are audio excerpts by famed French filmmaker François Truffaut from the early '60s (the film was championed by the French New Wave as a masterpiece).

Often copied, but never matched either in style or substance, *Psycho* still holds up because of a brilliant script, first-rate direction, excellent performances (Janet Leigh was nominated for an Oscar for her role), an iconic musical score featuring Bernard Herrmann's shrill violins, masterful cinematography and editing, not to mention that great, spooky old house. A departure from traditional American horror films of the time, the threat of danger was no longer from supernatural beings like vampires, werewolves and aliens, but from the human monster in the end, the words of Norman, "We all go a little mad sometimes," were never more apt.

James Burrell

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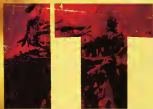
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CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

**DR. WITTY
I PRESUME?**
by John W. Bowen

Betcha thought I'd go all seasonal for the December issue, didn'tcha? Think again. With only a few exceptions (*Black Christmas* and...okay, I'm drawing a blank), Christmas-themed horror films pretty much blow, so I'm bah-humbugging the lot of 'em this year. It's appropriate, however, that I'm devoting this column to a couple of beloved figures from my childhood who showered me with gifts every Saturday afternoon.

Monster Movie Matinee, hosted by Dr. E. Nick Witty and his assistant Epal, was broadcast on WSYR from Syracuse, New York, my hometown of Kingston, Ontario was well within range, and my bounty was great. Once bidden inside the Monster Mansion, we were greeted by the Doctor — well, part of him, anyway. This dubious practitioner's face was so horribly disfigured in a lab accident that we were only allowed to see his forearm and gesticulating hand, adorned with gaudy rings and huge black nails. His hulking goiter Epal remained fully visible, costumed in an eye patch and covered in stitches that made his head resemble an oversized softball.

The twosome would appear in various locations — living room, library, laboratory, the attic sleeping chamber or, in one instance, a labyrinth beneath the house — where they would regale us with news of their latest experiments, most of which had gone awry, before the movie rolled. Some of the story arcs were one-offs, while others stretched over weeks. In between these baroque wraparounds, the mighty Matinee brought the classic Universal monsters into my preteen life, along with Godzilla, early Hammer and Roger Corman efforts, giant bug and flying saucer fare from the '50s and — huzzah! — *The Horror of Party Beach*!

Given the show's impact on untold thousands of budding horror nerds during its on-air run from 1964 to 1980, I was appalled when my recent YouTube search turned up zilch-point-zilch. Underestimated, I prevailed upon a Rue Mortuary message board member in Syracuse for help,



and now here I am, deep in conversation with one Alan Milar, a.k.a. Dr. Witty. Yep, *I'm talking to the hand*!

"I never had to 'work' a single day — I think we had more fun than the audience!" the charming septuagenarian exclaims with a laugh, while hastening to credit the dedication and flexibility of the show's crew. "It wasn't standard — we weren't rated to one spot like most other shows at the time."

Milar began his career as an announcer at WSYR in 1953, occasionally doubling as a news anchor. Developing and pitching the show to management after a market research survey revealed that 35% of the audience wanted to see horror movies, Milar and co-star Willard Lape also became the Matinee's creative team, writing scripts and developing their on-air personas. Lifelong horror fan Milar lists *Karloff*, *Lugosi*, *Price* and *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* — the first film the show presented — among his own faves.

Given Dr. Witty's facelessness, other nuances of performance were important; the character's stentorian off-camera voice, he says, was "a combination of all those late-night radio hosts on programs like *Lights Out* and *Inner Sanctum*."

Milar, it's safe to say, was never recognized in public, but since Lape also enjoyed tremendous local success as kids' show host Satty Sam, it

was important to make him up heavily for the role of Epal. "He had a tremendous talent with children," Milar recalls, "so we didn't want him to be recognized in this other role." Far-fetched as the show's storylines were, the actor remains incredulous that one — involving the cryogenic preservation of Epal's head in anticipation of a transplant — was actually taken seriously.

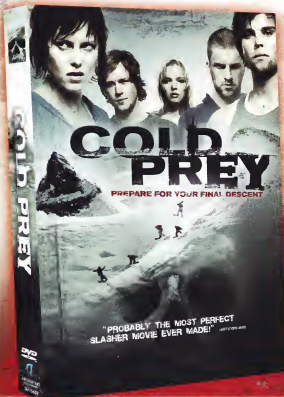
"I got a very nasty phone call from a professor at Syracuse University, who was demanding to know how we came by our information," he says. "I told him the truth — that I'd seen a short news wire story about it — but I don't think he believed me!"

Lape died several years back, but Milar, now 77, is "absolutely delighted" that the long-defunct show still enjoys a following in upstate New York and southeastern Ontario. He's also pleased to appear alongside many of his boogey-brethren in the upcoming horror host documentary *American Scary*, tentatively slated for release in the spring of 2009.

Here in the basement, however, the hour grows late as 2008 stumbles toward last call. To borrow from Ebenezer Scrooge's housekeeper, it's "in keeping with the situation" that I close this column by wishing you all a scary Christmas and a happy Rue Year. Now get the hell out of my basement and don't come back without extra figgy pudding. ☹

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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Ho-ho-horror, everybody! Think Christmas is all joy and happiness? Huh! Christmas can be as dark and scary a holiday as Halloween. Why, just the thought of getting together with my family sends chills up and down my spine.

Obviously I'm not alone, because comic creators have been mining the holiday season for scary story ideas for decades, which is why I decided to dedicate this column to some of my favorite spooky Christmas tales from over the years. So kick your family out of the house, pull up a chair next to the fire (or radiator) and let's all toast the creepy comics of Christmas past.

"THE SANTA CONTRACT"

HITMAN #22 (1997)

Garth Ennis and John McCrea

DC

A nuclear plant janitor falls into a vat, becomes radioactive, puts on a Santa suit and wreaks havoc in Gotham City. Hitman is hired to rub him out — sounds like a typical Garth Ennis story to me! Hitman had a reputation for bizarre plots, over-the-top gore and violence, and a wicked sense of humor. This issue has all those traits in spades. Whether it's radioactive Santa burning people's faces off, Hitman accidentally assaulting an innocent Santa or the bone-crushing climax ("Santa" gets run over before getting his head blown off), Ennis' greeting card to the holiday season is morbid, disgusting and a lot of fun.

their lives but is the Spectre willing to listen? John Ostrander did some great things with the Spectre, most importantly restoring him to the role of God's avenging angel, complete with an eye-for-an-eye philosophy. This issue perfectly blends the religious and moral themes running throughout the series with plenty of visceral violence and gore. And as a bonus you get the Spectre riding Santa's sleigh on the cover!

"DENIM"

UNCANNY X-MEN #143 (1980)

Chris Claremont and John Byrne
Marvel

I know, you're probably all wondering, "X-Men? That ain't no horror comic." That's technically true, but in their long history the mighty mutants have faced their share of monsters and supernatural horrors, and this issue is a prime example. Kitty Pryde finds herself alone in the X-mansion on Christmas Eve and has to go toe-to-toe against an other-dimensional creature that bears more than a slight resemblance to the big bad in Alien. In fact, the issue is very much a take on that sci-fi classic, with Kitty in the Sigourney Weaver role, night down to the climax which sees the creature burned up in the X-jet's afterburners. It functions perfectly as a straight horror tale, with the abandoned mansion the ideal creepy locale.



Hitman #22: Radioactive Santa burns a victim's face off

Earth. The highlight, however, is "Elvira's Christmas Carol," which sees Elvira given the Dickensian tour by three ghosts (two of which are former House hosts Cain and Abel). And even in comic form Elvira is still easy on the eyes.

"THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE..."

BATMAN AND THE OUTSIDERS #7 (1983)

Mike W. Barr, Jim Aparo

DC

What I said about X-Men applies to Batman as well, not surprisingly Gotham City has seen its share of horrors, and on this particular Christmas babies are disappearing and reappearing as withered, aged husks. When the Phantom Stranger (a super-powered Rod Serling type) comes a-calling, you know something spooky this way comes. For those of you who read my column last issue, this is one of those comics that seriously creeped me out when I was a kid. Why? A simple three-panel spread showing a newborn babe with glowing eyes telepathically assaulting his doctor. As if that wasn't enough, the babies in the hospital nursery then get up and start attacking Batman and friends in a wild frenzy. Somebody was clearly spiking the eggnog at the DC offices.

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good fright! ☺



"THE DOOR OF THE SOLSTICE"

THE SPECTRE #26 (1994)

John Ostrander
and John Ridgway

DC

The Spectre attempts to grant a priest's wish that no murders be committed in New York City on Christmas Eve. So when some street punks kill an innocent man just for kicks, he literally puts his hooks into them and demands their lives be forfeit. The priest comes to their aid and pleads for

ELVIRA'S HAUNTED HOLIDAYS 1987

Joy Cavalieri, Frank Springer, et al.

DC

DC tried to relaunch its House of Mystery series in the late '80s with Elvira as the hostess with the mostest, but alas, even hyperactive teen boys stayed away from this one. Despite low sales, DC pumped out a Christmas issue chock full of aliens, killer Christmas trees, fake Santa, real Santa and a post-nuclear war



The latest installment of *Rex Mundi's* medieval mystery saga brings us two tales. The first, "Ishmael," drawn by Guy Davis, is a brief and somewhat forgettable story involving infanticide. The second, however, features the welcome return of Brother Matthew, with his weak stomach and soft-spoken manners, is highly engaging. Unfortunately, just as the story is gaining intrigue, it comes to an abrupt stop with the announcement that its conclusion can be found on darkhorse.com! I understand the need for cross-marketing, but folks, this is not a good example. We should be encouraging people to read comics, not computers. The entire story in one book would have been a much more satisfying experience.



Here's an oddity: a 2008 comic book adaptation of an obscure horror film (TVings) released way back in 1989. A quick search on IMDb reveals that the Canadian production features porn star Amber Lynn and is supposed to be excruciatingly bad. Not having seen the movie, I can only comment on this adaptation which, while not excruciating, isn't that good either. Although competent — Green's pencils are cartoonish and surprisingly appealing — one gets the feeling that

any redeeming qualities in the film come from its low-budget effects, horrible acting and all around goofiness. Take that away and you're left with a bare-bones story, horrendous dialogue and less than paper-thin characterization. Perversely, it does make me want to check out the movie, so I guess it's done its job. Also includes an eight-page prologue written exclusively for the comic, which is more entertaining than the actual adaptation.

If there's something unique or particularly exciting about the title character in *Warlash* it has completely seared my head. Looking like a cross between Judge Dredd and Spider-Man villain The Scorpion, Warlash fights his way



through four separate tales in this issue. And when I say fight, I mean fight. The reader is thrown right into each skirmish, with nothing but Warlash's endless, mind-numbing narration to fill in the gaps. I haven't seen this much dialogue during fight scenes since the Marvel Age of Comics. The best of the four, "Crubbes," drawn by Steve Mannion, takes its time in setting up the story and is all the better for it. Unfortunately, since it's the first chapter, it comes to a rather abrupt and unsatisfying climax. (Two other stories are also first installments and end just as suddenly.) If the concluding chapters to these tales feature terrific denouements I will personally apologize to Mr. Forte, but for now I can only recommend the comic to diehard fans.



Mike Mignola finally returns to *Hellboy* as writer and artist, with "In the Chapel of Moloch." In this full-length tale Big Red travels to Portugal to investigate an American painter's rather odd behaviour after renting some property with an adjacent chapel. It turns out the place was once used by a cult of worshippers of Moloch, an ancient Middle Eastern god with a taste for children's blood. Bad mojo remains, and before long Hellboy is up to his

horns in more occult shenanigans. Mignola's hallmarks are all on display here: beautiful and moody art, sharp dialogue and crisp, fast-paced storytelling. While the tale isn't Earth-shattering, it is a lot of fun, and a new Mignola *Hellboy* is always cause for celebration.

The Cleaners are a CSI-type crew that clean up violent crime scenes, except... they're not with the police. In fact, their agenda is not made clear — just one of many mysteries in the opening issue.

After a brief introduction to the characters, things get rolling when the team is called in to clean up a gruesome bloodsoaked street in a residential neighborhood. Further research reveals that the blood in question belongs to several missing persons, some of whom disappeared nearly 30 years ago. Since this is the first chapter, a lot more questions are raised than answers supplied. This is not a bad thing as the script is excellent and Ekedal's clean art is very pleasing. And while nothing supernatural takes place in this issue (that we know of), there is the feeling that something in that vein is just around the corner. A great beginning to a promising series. **B**





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the monster hunter in modern popular culture

Heather L. Duda
McFarland

What makes a monster? To answer this, we must first decide what is human. This is the main focus in Heather L. Duda's investigation into the role of the monster hunter. Though originally intended as a dissertation, Duda has lengthened her thesis for the purpose of this technical (yet still accessible) and thoroughly entertaining book. Tracing the trajectory of the iconic monster hunter from the traditional "alienated intellectual" of the Victorian era, as evidenced by *Dracula's* Van Helsing, to the self-hating monster, such as *Interview with a Vampire's* Louis, she presents a well-rounded history of the ever-raging war between humanity and monstrosity.

Duda explains how, historically, monsters have symbolized what we deem most vile, most repugnant – the line society draws between good and evil. But over time that line becomes blurred, grey areas emerge and expand as our values become more complex and convoluted. As we evolve, so do our monsters, and so too must our monster hunters. This is proven by the fact that we are no longer satisfied with altruistic heroes, such as Superman, who are willing to martyr themselves unquestioningly for



the sake of humanity. Instead, modern popular culture presents us with half-breed creatures, such as Blade and Angel, torn between two different sides of themselves, or groups like The Watchmen and The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, who have questionable motives and standards, and are often working only toward their personal ends.

Duda's most intriguing topic is the evolution of women in horror, from the archetypal "Final Girl" who relies merely on chance, luck and virginity (think *Halloween's* Laurie Strode) to the blood-spattered warriors, such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer, that we see emerging today – women even more powerful than their historical male counterparts. She also reflects on how real-world events, such as the Vietnam War and Watergate, act as catalysts for the evolution of our monsters' natures, and how the loss of faith in authority and order that Americans experienced in the 1960s and '70s has been expressed in the rise of the chaotic and indiscriminate slasher killer, first seen in characters such as *Psycho's* Norman Bates. In the end, she makes a compelling point: evil, once seemingly cut and dry, and the monster, once seemingly destructible, have morphed into things which always lurk ambiguously in the background.

Although Duda seems to overuse the vampire as her go-to creature, she still pre-



sents a well-rounded history of the monster hunter as an iconic figure. Perhaps she's just saving the other ghouls for a future volume?

Jessa Sobczak

videodrome

Tim Lucas
Milpede

Long live the new flesh... In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the release of *Videodrome*, David Cronenberg's 1983 exploration of sex, violence and television, comes a collection of writings on the movie by the only journalist allowed on the set during filming, Tim Lucas. It's an eclectic mix of interviews, essays and behind-the-scenes anecdotes, and it's pretty comprehensive. Yet hardcore Cronenberg fans may still find a lot of the material familiar.

The list of interviewees is impressive: Cronenberg, James Woods, Deborah Harry, Sonya Smith, Les Carlson and a host of crew members involved with the production. However, if you have the two-disc Criterion DVD release from a couple of years back, you've probably seen the effects documentary "Forging the New Flesh," which includes more behind-the-scenes stills than the book provides, and have read "Medium Cruel," one of Lucas's

The Grim Reader

TERROR ISLAND

Rakko Kalg
Hadesgate

Vampires, werewolves, zombies and a virus-infested island to harbour them all. What initially seems to be an over-ambitious debut from novelist Rakko Kalg quickly proves itself a vertiginous nightmare. Thick with carnage, tortuously tense from start to finish and, needless to say, not for the faint-hearted, horror readers will find much to love, and fear, in this monstrous thriller.



Jessa Sobczuk

THE NIGHTMARE COLLECTION

Bruce Boston
Dark Regions

This fine little horror/dark fantasy poetry collection from Bruce Boston, which includes the delightfully silly marriage treatise "Curse of the Glottless Husband," also features appropriately strange and eerie illustrations courtesy of Russell Morgan. Ever a storyteller, whether in formal or free verse, Boston does not disappoint. Even those who sneer at poetry may want to take a look at Boston's work, with its odd item-universes and macabre musings.



Sandra Kasturi

WHERE THE DEEP ONES ARE

Kenneth Hill and
Andy Hopp

Talent
Where the Deep Ones Are is a retelling of H.P. Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" in the style of Maurice Sendak's hugely beloved children's story *Where the Wild Things Are*. Unfortunately, that's where the similarities end because *WDOA* shares none of the original's flair and imagination. A fantastic idea awaiting more capable hands.



Justin Erickson

THE REACH

Rita Konyan
Labours

Ten-year-old Sarah has spent a long time locked up in the basement of a children's mental institution – not because she's crazy, she just has some crazy-see psychic powers. Though *The Reach* treats a bad case to Stephen King's *Firestarter* at times, it is still a gripping, thoughtful story that delivers the scares in apesides.



Last Chances Lance



Videodrome: Tim Lucas' latest book goes behind the scenes of the Cronenberg classic

earliest articles on the film, a version of which appears in the booklet accompanying the DVD. You can't fault Lucas's dedication to covering all aspects of the production, so, it's a real shame that given the movie's fascination with voyeurism and morality, that very little space in this book is devoted to analyzing the film's themes and their relevance a quarter of a century after its initial release. There's not much here that deals with how the movie has aged or its remarkable relevance in a 21st-century world of camera phones, YouTube and the escalating freakshows of reality TV. "Why would anyone watch a scum show like *Videodrome*?" is still a complex and loaded question today, but it's one that this book unfortunately doesn't even attempt to answer.

You could argue that's not the book that Lucas set out to write, but given the amount of material on the DVD, it seems like a glaring omission in a medium more appropriate to theoretical and critical exposition. There's no doubt this is an interesting and well-written book, but if you're already a *Videodrome* nut, it may not tell you more than you already know.

Justine Warwick

The great monster magazines: a critical study of the black and white publications

Robert Michael "Bob" Cotter
McFarland

The Great Monster Magazines is a perfect example of why one should not judge a book by its cover – or title, for that matter. If you were to do so, you'd expect a tome

dedicated to examining horror magazines from the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

However, cracking the spine on Cotter's book with such expectations will leave readers disappointed, confused and likely a little upset. Prized as a "critical overview of monster magazines," the book does touch on the usual suspects (*Famous Monsters*, *Eerie* and *Castle of Frankenstein*), but also left this reviewer wondering when Conan the Barbarian and Doc Savage(!) earned the title of "monster."

Cotter seems more than a little confused about what his book was supposed to focus on. Is it about monster magazines or black and white illustrated magazines? Admittedly, he says in the preface that *The Great Monster Magazines* originated as a history of the "brief-but-fertile" Marvel Monster Group and grew from there, but the book's title and cover (actually the cover for issue 10 of *Scream* magazine from the 1970s) are still grossly misleading no matter which way you slice it.

The book is enjoyable while it remains on-topic, which is only until the fourth chapter when Cotter suddenly abandons the monsters in light of critiquing numerous issues of *The Savage Sword of Conan*, *Savage Tales* and *Planet of the Apes* publications. That's not to say these titles do not deserve respect, and Cotter certainly knows his stuff, but where are the promised in-depth examinations of *Famous Monsters*, *The Monster Times* and other classic monster magazines that bred a generation of fright film fans? Sure, these mags are mentioned, and select issues are picked over by Cotter, but the insight here is sparse and their histories are simply relegated to a few paragraphs that introduce each publication –

WRITER AXELLE CAROLYN SURVEYS THE 21st CENTURY'S CINEMATIC
CARNAGE IN *IT LIVES AGAIN! HORROR MOVIES IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM*.

THE NEW MONSTER SHOW

by SEAN PLUMMER



For a genre often marginalized by the mainstream, horror has been surprisingly well-documented. Regularly scan the book review section of this magazine and you'll soon realize that if it's scary and on film, someone somewhere has written a book about it. Among the best is David J. Skal's *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (1993), a highly respected work that definitively traces horror's long history, examining its roots in art, literature and myth, as well as how social forces shape movie trends... up until 2001 at least (if you get the newest edition).

One of Skal's admirers is lifelong genre fan Axelle Carolyn. Born in Belgium, Carolyn, 29, worked as a horror journalist, model and actress (including small roles in her husband Neil Marshall's film *Doomsday* and the upcoming *The Descent 2*) before embarking on writing her book. Inspired by Skal's masterwork, *It Lives Again! Horror Movies in the New Millennium* (out now from Telos Publishing) examines the genre's virtual death post-*Scream* and its bloody rebirth in the 21st century, with films such as *The Crying Game*, *The Descent* and *The Devil's Backbone*. Through interviews conducted during her journalistic career, as well as internet sources and well-thumbed copies of *Rue Morgue*, Carolyn anticipates, among other topics, the increased profile of international fright flicks (particularly J-horror and works from Spain and France), the rise of torture porn and the resurrection of the zombie. While its scope is obviously narrower than Skal's text, Carolyn

hopes she has done justice to her inspiration.

"Skal's book was so smart, so thorough, so well written that I immediately thought, if I ever write a book about horror, it needs to be something in the same vein," she says. "Whether I succeeded is another question, but I certainly strove to achieve something similar in tone and quality. I loved his approach, putting every film in its historical context and looking for links between the main trends and world events. My background is in international law and politics, so I saw this as a great opportunity to put together my understanding of socio-political events and my love of horror."

Inevitably, 9/11 is identified as a watershed event in the genre's movement away from the relative bloodlessness of late-'90s horror.

"I think it jump-started the new horror wave," she says. "It's a well-known fact that horror is more popular in times of crisis, when people are afraid and the future seems uncertain. Nine-eleven, the anthrax paranoia, the war against terror, the London bombings... it's a much scarier time than fifteen years ago, and it's only logical that movies should reflect that. Even mainstream films are a lot more violent than they were in the '90s—James Bond got tortured in *Casino Royale*!"

When asked why she didn't hold off writing *It Lives Again!* until after 2010, Carolyn says that she



was less interested in examining the current decade than the recent influx of horror films. She goes on to explain that the book starts in 2000 (with a quick intro covering the '90s), "because I thought it'd be too hard to pinpoint the beginning of that wave. It's also very hard to pinpoint the end of a trend, so I knew that, even if when I started writing there were articles all over the web proclaiming that horror was dead, it'd be impossible to wait for horror to disappear from theatres."

Indeed, while mainstream media proclaims the death of horror at least bi-annually (usually in conjunction with the box-office failure of the latest big-budget Hollywood production), Carolyn knows that while it may flirt with the Grim Reaper, the genre never dies for the fans.

"If you live and breathe horror, it doesn't matter if the latest big release doesn't do well theatrically, or if all the best movies come out direct-to-DVD," she explains. "There's always a good indie or foreign film to watch, even when horror doesn't have the attention of US studios."

Whether or not the world's ongoing financial crisis sparks a new trend (recessionary horror, anyone?). Carolyn believes horror hounds should be satisfied well into the next decade. She notes: "As long as filmmakers keep coming up with fresh ideas and renew themselves, we should be fine." **B**



patient zero

Jonathan Maberry
St. Martin's Griffin

The first of an intended trilogy featuring Baltimore detective-cum-counterterrorist Joe Ledger, *Patient Zero* ramps up the horror of the War on Terror when zombies become the weapon of choice.

Ledger is the kind of man a man wants when a man wants a man. Well, at least the kind of man they want to read about in their fiction. He's a tough, quick-witted cop recruited by an ultra-secret government taskforce called the Department of Military Sciences (DMS) to help stop a well-funded rogue terrorist faction from turning a good chunk of the world's population into "walkers." Not unlike the chemistry being behind the Rage virus of *28 Days Later*, once infected, the victims become frothing, screaming,

killing machines—fleet of foot, strong as hell and only stoppable by a headshot or devastating spinal injury. With the first carrier (referred to as "patient zero") able to take out more than 200 people, Ledger must lead a team of the military's best and brightest to save the planet from a rapid obliteration. The first two missions don't go exactly as planned, though, and it's suspected there might be a fissure in the team. Ledger's world is crumbling around him, but if he can't

stop certain apocalypse, who can? Of course, his inner demons might just eat him before the zombies do.

Multiple Bram Stoker Award-winner Jonathan Maberry (*Ghost Road Blues*; *Dead Man's Song*) doesn't spare a single drop of blood in bringing the planet to its knees. He keeps the tension taut by organizing the book into short scenes within chapters, so once *Patient Zero* has you in its sights, you'll be a slave to its rapid-fire dialogue, appalling bloodbaths and hard-boiled storytelling. And, as outlined in the author's note, most of the technical information in the novel is based upon existing, if still untested, technologies and the parasite, however fictitious, is "inspired by similar pathogens currently present in science." He would know, of course, because he also penned *Zombie CSI: The Forensics of the Living Dead* (PMR03). So, not only is *Patient Zero* incredibly entertaining and absolutely terrifying, its looming apocalypse is timely, realistic and, best of all, conceivable. Oh, the horror.

Trevor Tuminski

that's it. Some of the magazines Cotter examines were, indeed, great, but this book will never earn that status.

W. Bruce McVicar

ghost stories

Peter Washington, ed.
Alfred A. Knopf

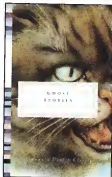
For \$17, you're not going to find a better looking or more well-made book than this one. It's a hardcover, complete with cloth-sewn bindings and ribbon marker, printed on acid-free, cream-woven paper; its craftsmanship handily shames everything else in its price range. Sadly, there's not much else to justify buying this anthology.

Firstly, *Ghost Stories*, courtesy of the Everyman's Library series, seems cobbled together, possibly as a bit of a lark. It may be intended as a broad-sweeping survey of ghost stories, as included within are works by big names such as Ray Bradbury, Walter de la Mare, Edith Wharton, W.W. Jacobs and Vladimir Nabokov, that were written anywhere from 1927 to 1990. But since there is no introduction, there's really no way to know. However, it does feel like it was put together by someone who isn't familiar enough with uncanny stories to know which actually warrant the prestigious Everyman imprint treatment.

Of the tales included, Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Body-Snatcher," Guy de Maupassant's "The Horla" and M.R. James' "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad" are not only way over-anthologized, but are also readily available online. (Which, in its own right, might warrant a re-evaluation of a modern anthologist's job. That being: if works are easily available online, should they even be included in a collection?) Editor Peter Washington also serves up three comical works in his nineteenth-story lineup. Once again, with no introduction the reader can only guess at his intentions here. But since these humorous interludes only serve to deflate the entire collection, one quickly gets the impression that Washington himself simply does not take the genre seriously—or seriously enough.

This book might make a nice gift for the uninitiated, but true horror literature aficionados probably already own the best of this book's tales in other, much more cohesive, collections.

Michael Mitchell



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TRAVELOGUE OF

TERROF

MOTHMAN FESTIVAL
Point Pleasant, West Virginia
by Ike Oden



West Virginia has long been a state purported to harbour unnatural happenings: ghoulish ghosts, beastly bigfoots (bigfeet?), UFO landings and all other forms of backwoods boogeymen. Among this paranormal pantheon, none is more famous or widely celebrated than that of Point Pleasant, West Virginia's "Mothman."

The Mothman is a cryptozoological creature that was spotted more than 100 times from 1966 to 1967 in Point Pleasant and its outlying areas. Among this man-sized monster's most commonly described features is a ten to twelve-foot moth-like wingspan emanating from a man-like torso, atop of which rests a pair of hypnotic, glowing red eyes.

The creature's reign of terror was accompanied for a year-and-a-half by a massive

trend of UFO sightings, visits from mysterious "Men in Black" and humanoids supposedly from outer space. The events chronicling these characters make up the plotline of John Keel's famous book *The Mothman Prophecies*, which in 2002 was adapted to the screen as a Richard Gere vehicle. The same year as the movie's release, the Mothman made a triumphant return to Appalachia in the form of Point Pleasant's Mothman Festival, a weekend-long celebration of all things Moth and man, held for the seventh year this past September.

The event is organized by Jeff Wamsley, entrepreneur and current curator of the town's Mothman Museum and local diner owner Carolin Harris. Festivities are held mostly along Point Pleasant's Main Street, which houses both the Mothman Museum and Ganin Park. The latter locale acts as the festival's vendor headquarters and displays the famous stainless steel Mothman statue (sculpted by artist Bob Roach), Point Pleasant's most frequently photographed attraction.

Aside from the statue, the Mothman Museum remains the festival favourite, it's affordably priced at \$5 for adults, \$3 for children ten and under. From the outside, the storefront sized, one-storey Mothmuseum doesn't elicit the awe that its subject has managed to inspire throughout the years. Despite its noticeably quaint size, the museum houses enormous, vastly detailed collection of Mothman documents, evidence and memorabilia.

The '60s-era tan checkered tiling gives way to a long red carpet, upon which rest three lines of tables holding the display cases. Inside these cases are seemingly everything even remotely connected to the creature: original newspaper clippings, local police accounts, movie memorabilia, Japanese toys and bizarre government papers, such as Robert Kennedy's letter to John Keel regarding the events. Suspended from the ceiling are models of the monster, movie props and posters. To top it off, not one but three televisions (two in the main foyer, one in a sanctioned-off

screening room) play Moth-umentaries in looped intervals. Wamsley's museum tells an elaborate, ambitious and wholly complete version of the Mothman legend, making it a must for everyone from the uninitiated gawkers to the self-proclaimed experts. Just try to avoid the large crowds if you are claustrophobic.

Next up is the new bus tour of the TNT Area (a defunct government arms factory) and the North Power Plant (home of one of the most famous Mothman sightings), both of which have long been rumoured to be the creature's hideout. For \$17 you're piled onto a bus with fellow monster lovers, conspiracy enthusiasts and Mothman kicks of all ages. The tour, presided over by Wamsley and his staff, presents a summarized version of the legend and the infamous locations involved.

The high point of the experience is entry into two of the mysterious igloos long-theorized to be involved in the origins of the Mothman. These sooty, dank hideouts were strategically hidden from enemy spies deep in the backwoods of Mason County. Long since sectioned-off by the local government due to fear of noxious and hazardous materials inside, the two cleared-out bunkers offered on the tour are nearly worth the price of admission. Unfortunately, the "daylight tour" aspect of this reviewer's experience did little to help bring the somnifere beyond eerie, and the time allotted to explore the igloos' interiors (vacant though they may be) was entirely too brief.

The tour concludes with a drive to the demolished ground of the North Power Plant, ending with a fizzie, rather than a bang, as the site is now little more than a vacant fenced-off lot in the middle of nowhere. The desolate road and winding ivy overtaking the rusted aluminum fencing might be somewhat spooky in the wee hours, but in the sober light of day smacks of generic rural Appalachia. When it's all said and done, tour-goers are awarded a bumper sticker and an "I Survived The Mothman Tour" certificate signed by the guide. In the end, the experience of visiting the

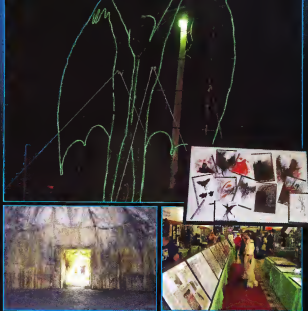


long-hidden igloos neatly distinguishes the tour from its brethren. However, the price makes it recommendable to hardcore Mothman fans only.

The tour's sister event is the TNT Hayride, a far more affordable and popular endeavour for Mothpatrons young and old. It's held both Friday and Saturday night of the fest at Point Pleasant's Farm Museum, a six-mile drive from the event's Main Street headquarters. Tickets (and directions) are available at the official Mothman Tour booth located squarely in front of the statue. Tickets run \$5 for adults, \$3 for kids. While it takes a drive through the desolate countryside at night to get there, the giant neon-green Mothman(!) make the Farm Museum hard to miss. The rides are scheduled by ticketed times in advance and run in fifteen-minute intervals.

For readers who've never experienced a hayride, the concept basically entails a group of people gathered inside a tractor trailer that's dragged at an incredibly slow pace through an outdoor location. In this case, the route is a cleared-out path of the aforementioned TNT Area, thoroughly tricked out with as many artificial monsters as Wamsley and Co. could find. Local youths and adults are decked out as intimidating Men in Black, police search teams, the Ghostbusters and Mothmen. These performances are embellished by low-key special effects, including floating lights, cackling creature screams and Mothman animations that attack from above. It's the kind of old-fashioned spookshow done on a tight budget by locals that's charming enough to evoke the spirit of William Castle himself. Creepy, kooky and even a little educational, the hayride is hokey fun for the whole family.

Additionally, the festival holds various delights apart from its tours and museum. On both Saturday and Sunday, guest speakers are featured in an open forum at Point Pleasant Riverfront Park. Hosted by Detroit-based Ghostly Talk Radio, the highlighted 2008 guests were Chad Lambert (Mothman comic writer), Robin Paynt Bellamy (seen on TV's *Sci-Fi* investigations), Travis Short (Mothman documentarian) and James Willis



Moth Menia: (clockwise from top) A sign beckons visitors to the Farm Museum, a collection of Mothman art, discussions in the Mothman Museum, an "igloo" at the defunct government arms factory, (below) a Mothman-themed puzzle, (opposite top) a Mothman costume, and (opposite bottom) Point Pleasant's popular Mothman statue.

(author of the book *Weird Ohio*). Each speaker participates in Q&A sessions following their lectures, as well as maintains booths in the vendors' area for more accessible conversation and goods schilling.

Finally we come to the vendors themselves, perhaps the most curious, sought-after cherry on the crypto-cake for souvenir lovers. The Festival's rows of vending booths give you every miracle of Mothman memorabilia you could ever dream of. From Mothman flapjacks and pizzas to prototype action figures, models and every kind of T-shirt imaginable, the Mothman's popularity is perhaps most evident in the merchandising.

However, not everything comes with a price tag, as the Festival holds a number of contests with Moth-merch for prizes, including a Miss Mothman beauty pageant, a Mothman strengthman contest and a costume contest — all which continue throughout the weekend until the Sunday evening's closing.

Overall, the Mothman Festival is more than worthy of any monster or paranormal fan's attention, making the greatest impact on young children and the young at heart.

Point Pleasant's Mothman Festival runs the weekend of September 19-20, 2008. Entry is free; however, it is recommended hotel reservations are made far in advance. For more information on the event and the Mothman himself, visit mothmanlives.com.





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THE GORE-MET

MENU

The Gore-met messes with some grubby grindhouse wannabes.



Remakes and homages reign as the decade lumbers to an end, but when the epitaph is written and we remember that this was a prolific but rebread period for the horror genre, will we recall these valiant efforts?

VAGRANT

Starring Russ Hurley, Sheila Marr and Tim LeMance
Written by Charlie Vargas
Directed by Lou Vockell
OTR Productions

The Robert Rodriguez/Quentin Tarantino collaboration *Grindhouse* was the not the first film to visually imitate '70s exploitation, but it is certainly the highest profile. However, there is no one better suited to promulgate the concept than a legitimate low-budget filmmaker unfettered by commercial sensibilities or ego.

Like many an exploitation film of that storied era, *Vagrant* is purportedly based on a true story. The plot is best described as *Reservoir Dogs* meets *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. After a big heist, a quartet of armed robbers hole up in a grungy abandoned building with a young female hostage until they can blow town. Meanwhile, a fatal drug addict lurks within, ready to slam intruders on a meat hook, slit their throats or gouge their eyes out with his thumbs. While the crooks plot to cut each other out and abscond with the loot, the vagrant stalks.

Vagrant successfully captures the elusive look and feel of a '70s film. The location is righteously rundown, and the story was crafted to capitalize on it. As well, the film's image quality was degraded to look as if it lay lost in a puddle of water in the basement of a 42nd Street theatre. This visual aesthetic enhances the atmosphere of *Vagrant* only at the expense of the gore effects in the violent and bloody climax.

The cast also helps sell the movie by turning in strong performances, particularly Russ Hurley as the de facto leader and Gern Sulyak as a psychopathic yoxo who gets off on slashing pretty young girls with a straight razor.

Vagrant is currently looking for a home on the festival circuit; for more go to cinemafilmindustry.com.



BLITZKRIEG: ESCAPE FROM STALAG 69

Starring Charles Esser, Steve Montague and Talyana Kot
Written and directed by Keith J. Crocker
WildEye Releasing

If there is any exploitation subgenre that would seem permanently consigned to the dumpster of cinematic history, it would be the Nazisploitation films of the '70s, epitomized in such unemittingly sleazy Italian entries as *Gastapo's Last Orgy* (1977) and *SS Hell Camp* (1977). Although the Nazis in those films were invariably demonized and received just punishment, playing the Holocaust for sex 'n' gore shirts and giggles in today's moral climate is daring to say the least.

This new film opens in 1955, with a trio of Mossad agents breaking into the Argentinean hideaway of Helmut Schultz (Charles Esser), a former Nazi POW camp commandant, to arrest him for war crimes. Schultz escapes and takes refuge in a church, where he confesses his wartime activities to a priest in an extended flashback.

Blitzkrieg hits most of the major genre marks. Schultz is a depraved sadist who tortures his Russian and American prisoners to the delight of his cackling henchmen. Women are stripped,

humiliated and tortured, providing requisite full-frontal nudity. In addition, a female officer is hopelessly in love with a heroic American officer who is planning a mass breakout. Allied forces loom on the horizon.

Director Keith J. Crocker literally went balls out to make *Blitzkrieg* as tasteless as possible, although he wisely eschewed any mention of concentration camps or the Holocaust.

Unfortunately, though, only the soundtrack is authentic. *Blitzkrieg* was shot on video, and *Long Island* will never pass for Germany. The cast roster

is middle-aged and devoid of the lovely Euro starlets (and pubic hair) that are part of the appeal of the original Nazisploitation cycle. And as much as the actors play to win, the performances range from amusing to rank. Painfully affected accents come and go like Rudolf Hess' loyalty. There's an abundance of gore — tongues are cut out, genitals are graphically mutilated and bamboo shoots are shoved under fingernails — but

the effects are as unconvincing as the rest of the film, particularly the CG gun smoke and bullet hits.

That said, *Blitzkrieg* is a laudable effort that succeeds as the sort of gleefully offensive low-budget trash cine-masochists revel in. The interrogation room is at blitzkriegthemovie.com.



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MIRRORS (2008)

Javier Navarrete

Lakeshore Records

Mirrors by Javier Navarrete (Parr's *Labyrinth*) is an elegant, dramatically expansive score that captures the kind of emotional subtlety and insecurities that get lost when a director spends more time setting up lame shocks than developing characters. So while *Mirrors* the film may have withered from theatre screens, Navarrete's music is still worth revisiting for its tender themes ("Ben Carson") and moments of slowly unfurling unease ("First Night"). The composer's shock cuts aren't all-out assaults, and there's a beautiful interplay between the divine (little chamber and solo piano theme fragments) and the profane (the orchestral gnashing in "Angela's Death"), particularly when the two factions converse and taunt each other with sometimes brutal results. A beautiful nightmare crafted by another superb Spanish composer. **MRH *******

Soundtrack

Next Door. With a 93-piece orchestra at his disposal, Shore ably blends horror and comedy in a very broad and thematically diverse canvas, yet keeps the tone classically gothic, and never loses sight of the film's character arcs. The jaunty tone of "Professor Crowley" is contrasted by "Steam from the Yard," with its eddying strings and percolating brass, and the organized cacophony of "Terabeads." Shore's pizz background also ensures the score's action cues are propelled by some punchy rhythms and clean transitions between brass and strings. Tightly edited and beautifully mastered, *Jack Brooks* is a grand little haunted house ride. **MRH *******



LEVIATHAN

A Silhouette In Splinters

Moreland

Known up until now as one of America's most depressing and misanthropic black metal acts, the one-man project dubbed *Leviathan* (by its creator Wreast) has done a complete 180-degree turn with this latest release. It eschews the usual bleak dissonance, bludgeoning drums and blood-curdling screaming to instead create an album's worth of dark, guitar-driven, minimalist ambient soundscapes and loosely structured noise. While that may not sound like the most exciting endeavor, the haunting beauty and emotional weight of *Silhouette* makes it both a frightening and unusual experience. The ten-minute opener, "Traveling Over the Ocean's Skull," sets a brooding tone with its ethereal layers, while the rest of the album is imbued with refreshingly diverse guitar work that ranges from rever-

Anticist

soaked poking to melodic walls of distortion. Wreast's vocals — used very sparingly — are guttural and distant, as if drifting up from some subterranean darkness. As a result, *Silhouette* is as melancholic as it is claustrophobic, as beautiful as it is frightening, and consistently unsettling. **BT *******



NORTH SIDE KINGS

Suburban Royalty

I Scream Records

No, we're not reviewing this album because of vocalist Danny Marinano's world-famous caught-on-video knockout of Glenn Danzig, but there you go, we've already mentioned it — as does the band in the album's liner notes, still sounding plenty pleased with themselves. Anyway, the real reason we're reviewing this is because Marinano happens to be a huge horror nut, serving as one of

Hardcore

the main dudes behind horror fan site *Icanmeltyourbrains.com*, and representing the genre here with the track "Street Trash," based on the '80s splatter classic of the same name. Other than that song, and to a lesser extent a cover of Anthrax's "Among the Living" (which is based on Stephen King's *The Stand*), *Suburban Royalty* stays away from horror, choosing instead to stick to the time-honored hardcore philosophies of fighting, gangsta' bitches and the size of Marinano's wang. A solid and punishing, if predictable and incredibly stupid, chunk of thrugore brutality. **AVL *******



THE RABIES

Night Terror

Venom Distillery Records

Much like *RAW* takes *The Creepshow*,

Black



JACK BROOKS: MONSTER SLAYER

Ryan Shore

MovieScore Media

Ryan Shore finally gets to flex some orchestral muscle with *Jack Brooks*. With this latest effort he also gets the opportunity to score a movie that's far less emotionally punishing than recent thrillers such as *The Girl*

Soundtrack



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GHOULTOWN

Life After Sundown

ZOMET Records

If Johnny Cash, Rob Zombie and Lenny from *Motörhead* crashed into the middle of an Enkai Moriconi spaghetti-western scene, what you'd have is *Ghoultown* — back at last with its sixth full-length kick-ass mix of heavy western sounds and Texas-fied tales. And every track on *Life After Sundown* has a story to tell. Particularly notable: "Drink with the Living Dead," an awesome six-minute epic about undead gunslinger Stanton Cree, who's been "cursed to walk the earth and challenge every night a man to match me drink for drink or by the bullet die." There are also a few horror nods, including "I Spent your Grave" and "Wormholes on Wheels," and some straight-up ghoulish punk ("Dead Outlaw"), before a stripped-down cover of The Mafias' "London Dungeon" caps off *Ghoultown*'s most complete album to date. Chasing worms, dueling with deadies and time, rides to hell, *Life After Sundown* gets dark, dusty and cruel. Now duck, sucker! **ED *******

Horrority



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BEHEMOTH

Ekaton

Metal Blade

Behemoth's seventh EP wastes no time in bruising several of your internal organs with a good, old-fashioned blackened death metal pummeling on this traser to their tenth studio album, out next year. Bookended by a studio re-recording and live version of "Chant for Ekaton 2000" from their 1999 album *Satanica*, Ekaton finds the prolific Poles in fighting form as they continue to reject religion and plow through covers of the Ramones' "I'm Not Jesus" (cleverly switching the refrain from "I can't heal you" to "I can't kill you") and a remorseless version of "Jensei Pökel" by Czech black metal band, Master's Hammer, as well as one new song, "Qadosh" (Hebrew for "holy"), that sounds like it's being poured out of stone tablets and pounded into pulverized animal skins. Two more well-recorded live cuts won't change the fact the brevity of the EP form can be just plain frustrating, but this is a tasty morsel from what looks to be a coming feast. **TT 8.5/10**

Death Metal



The Rabies are a contagious horror punk crew with a punchy sound covered in cobwebs and doused in formaldehyde. The Buffalo, NY quintet isn't nearly as slick though, proving perhaps you really are where you're from. "Domination of the Dead" and "Whiplash Love" are musically a little rough around the edges but will still get under your skin as singer Lexi Lawsuit channels Siouxsie Sioux, sounding like she's got the unmarked grave picked out long before you try to stick her with the cheque. The band's guitarist, Dr. Silk, will easily snare you with the snaking guitar swirls that burrow into your brain on "Black Lagoon Bordello." It's still nothing new – god knows horror punk is becoming a plague in itself – but The Rabies are like the younger, homelier sister of the star cheerleader. Maybe not as hot but still good for a roll. **TT 8.5/10**



ORGR

Devil's in My Details

SPV

Devil's in My Details is Skinny Puppy's frontman Ogre's third solo disc (released under the moniker orGr) and is easily his most personal and introspective album to date – it's also sensuosity diverse. The eleven tracks kick off with the Ministry-like "Shh," before skulking into the more haunting "Three." But the sonic smorgasbord doesn't end there: there's also the playfully carnival-styled "Feelin' Chicken," the pop-musical "Timebomb" and the Skinny Puppy throwback ballad "Witness."

Industrial

Bill Moseley and Ogre must have become friends while filming *Reptil*, since Moseley contributes several spoken word segments throughout the album. Initially jarring, these interludes grow on you after several listens and add to the eclectic nature of the disc as a whole. Devil's in My Details can be viewed as the sum of Moseley's Ogre's musical endeavours; his career with Skinny Puppy, touring stint with Ministry and the Martin Atkins' co-headed *Rx/Batman* have all undoubtedly influenced this richly textured and layered album, which even includes some new experimental palettes we haven't heard from Ogre before. **JE 8.5/10**



SYCKSYDE

Sometimes They Come Back

3rd SHIT ENTERTAINMENT

Gotta hand it to SickSyde, it just doesn't get much, well, sicker than the lyrics to "Cannibalism," a sweet sounding ode to human flesh recipes set to Rix Orlan's *Cannibal Holocaust* theme. We'd feed you a lyric sample but we'd probably be brought up on some kind of obscenity charge. Indeed, like many a horrorcore effort, *Sometimes They Come Back* focuses heavily on over-the-top gore and graphic lyrics about murder and rape, though they are peppered with references to Romero and Deodato films to give it that video horror vibe. Musically, SickSyde keeps things melodic and steady, occasionally working in old school horror soundtrack effects that

Hip-Hop

are both creepy and interesting. Somewhat repetitive in places, *Sometimes They Come Back* could stand some fat-trimming, but all in all it's got more than enough tasty morsels to satisfy the death rap sicko in all of us. **AVL 8.5/10**



CRADLE OF FILTH

Godspeed The Devil's Thunder

ROADRABBIT

A lush yet brooding, ominous symphony into that segues into sickly produced gothic black metal? Check. Foreboding narrations care of Douglas Bradley? You betcha. Heady concept about some kind of twisted evil? Naturally. This couldn't be anything other than a Cradle of Filth album, and for what it's worth, after countless lineup changes, an endless stream of LPs and EPs, and a virtual crossover into mainstream success, the Dani Filth-led British black metalers have never really disappointed (though they've occasionally come close). Fortunately, the band's latest offers up some of the heaviest, most blistering songs they've written in years. Thematically based on the life of 15th-century nobleman/serial killer/sexual deviant/Satanist Gilles de Rais, *Godspeed* is full of Dani Filth's gift for forming complex narratives around his band's fairly standard blend of blistering drums, dirge-y interludes and operatic backing vocals. One gets the feeling, though, that the players are so entrenched in their comfort zone that they'll never really push themselves into uncharted territory again. **BT 8.5/10**

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**BLOOD CEREMONY INVOKES '70s OCCULT CINEMA
AND CLASSIC HORROR PULPS TO SUMMON THEIR
OWN RETRO ROCK DEMONS.**

MUSIC FOR THE Black Masse

by EVAN DAVIES

"I'M NOT INTERESTED IN REALISM; we all have day jobs," sums up guitarist/songwriter Sean Kennedy of his occult/dark fantasy-inspired band Blood Ceremony. Sitting in the front room of his house in west Toronto, his influences are apparent. The walls are adorned with classic horror movie posters, including *The Devil's Bride* and *Simon - King of the Witches*; there's a bookshelf full of old horror pulp fiction from Lowcraft and Arthur Machen, reference books on the occult, a *Blind Dead* DVD collection and so on.

"There's a lot [of influence] from the pulp horror school like H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard, and definitely Clark Ashton Smith, whose stories really transport you somewhere very exciting and different; they're very powerful," notes Kennedy, citing the band's song "The Rare Lord" - about "a necromantic king who summons armies in the night" - as being directly inspired by Smith.

The doom-meets-prog quartet is rounded out by bassist Chris Landon, drummer Andrew Haust and bewitching vocalist Alia O'Brien, who laces the songs with a haunting flute that could make Pan himself a little jealous.

And yes, they do in fact have day gigs. Kennedy is a professor, while Landon and O'Brien are currently pursuing academia (the former for medieval history, the latter for music).

Since forming in '05, Blood Ceremony has established itself as a heavy and charismatic doom act, thanks in part to their creepily authentic, riff-heavy retro sound that's been dubbed "witch rock." The band's recently released self-titled debut has been described as a bubbling

brew of Sabbath, Jethro Tull and Coven; with a healthy dash of psychedelic rock to finish. That they don't look and act the part of your average metal band might cause a few double-takes.

"It's not a concern of ours to be a part of any community of horror-inspired bands," insists Kennedy. "If there is a heritage of horror with music it would have to include groups like Death SS, Goblin, The Misfits and Rocky Erickson. [They're] obviously so different musically, but are linked by what inspires them. These are all legendary groups, and I certainly wouldn't compare them with Blood Ceremony."

Kennedy's more eager to talk about how some of his favourite movies and directors have helped shape the group. He explains that the band takes its name from the 1973 Spanish flick (a.k.a. *Ceremonia Sangre*) by Jorge Grau - a key influence on their sound.

"It's about the Elizabeth Bathory legend, but with a really good twist," says Kennedy. "It's very realistic for a horror film - there are no supernatural elements. It's about this small village that gets caught up with the idea that there's a vampire kind of wandering around, and it's just a really intense, relentless film, so we thought that would be a good place to start."

From there, he would delve into his favourite movies and scores, looking for inspiration and what films left a lasting impression. Aside from his ultimate fantasy gig of scoring for Jean Rollin, who Kennedy reverently calls "an incredible film-

maker with a very morbid and psychedelic vibe," his list is a long one. It includes mainly horror films from the '70s - anything American with "themes of suburban witchcraft," British films about the occult, such as *Psychomania*, and genre favourites coming out of Italy.

"The influence comes from all the music from the Italian horror movies: the scores from Lucio Fulci films and obviously Dario Argento. But horror films really provided the specific atmosphere that we were trying to go for with the music; it was less about horror themes and more about the imagery that was kind of inspiring for us. It's about the haunting quality of the film."

The band has incorporated this imagery into its stage show, projecting horror film footage during their sets, which play out like some blasphemous midnight cemetery ritual. And although Blood Ceremony has gigged mainly between Toronto and Montreal, with a one-off show in New York City, they're forming a cult of their own. The first pressing of their record has sold out and they've already been approached by filmmakers to do some soundtrack work.

For Kennedy, it's all about invoking the demons that live within us.

"The kind of imagery you find in horror films is often very primal stuff," he says. "It's designed to generate a reaction, to get a response from people. The language of horror lurks beneath the surface of everyday life, and it informs our darker impulses and motivations which we don't always care to examine."





PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS **PLAYABILITY** **SHIVERS**

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING

PS3, XBOX 360, PC

Konami

Being a huge fan of the *Silent Hill* series, I've travelled to that fog-bound scary-as-shit town far too many times. I've fought the skinned demon dogs, battled the twelfth nurses and been hacked to pieces by good ol' Pyramid Head. Go figure, I couldn't wait to get my shaky hands on the sixth installment of this series, *Silent Hill: Homecoming*.

As grizzled war vet Alex Shepherd, players explore the town of Shepherd's Glen and Silent Hill, trying to solve the mysterious disappearances of his father and younger brother. Featuring a storyline rife with infanticide, mental illness and child abuse, *Homecoming* presents the perfect balance of puzzle-solving and exploration as you battle horrifying monsters while frantically searching for clues in newspaper clippings and diary entries.

Yes, the nurses are back and are as jerky as ever, but there are also some cool new adversaries that'll make you wet your pants, including the Needlers, whose limbs have been replaced with massive blades, and the abhorrent Lurkers, who leap up out of the sewers to play a little basketball with your pounding heart.

Set to an eerie soundtrack – provided by original title composer Akira Yamaoka – *Homecoming* features magnificent graphics that depict the misty, decaying environments. Players will also marvel at the improved movement and camera controls – not to mention the inclusion of a new "crouch" button that you can use to avoid enemy attacks.

With up to five different endings available, the replay value of this game is huge, as are the scares. Next stop: *Silent Hill: Welcome Home*.



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The tiny 19th-century town of Shadowbrook may be a nice place to visit during the day, but at night, a horrific creature has been kidnapping unsuspecting villagers and despoiling the countryside with their corpses.

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down scarecrows, vampires, spectral horsemen and werewolves. The game advances as players roll dice and move around the board, battling enemies and exploring different parts of the town in an effort to collect useful items such as pitchforks and lynchings. Gather allies while searching for the creature's lair for a final showdown.

Overall, this is a fast-paced, challenging game that comes complete with high-quality plastic character figures, thick glossy playing cards and a sturdy, wonderfully illustrated gaming board. A fitting touch for a super-supernatural game.



VAMPIRE RAIN: ALTERED SPECIES

PS3

Capcom

I love vampire-themed games and I've always on the bowl for any titles that'll let me stake a bloodsucker. Even *Blanch* this is the sequel to the last year's hack'n'slash *Vampire Rain* (BMK77) – I thought I'd give it a try. Big mistake.

Not much has improved in this follow-up, which looks and feels like a much older PS2 title. Playing a special agent combing the city streets for creatures of the night, it's hard to not be

annoyed by the fact that most of your weapons are completely ineffective against your enemies, and if you get spotted, you die. No saves, no exceptions!

If you choose to play this excessively linear and completely derivative game, there are at least a couple of cool effective weapons you can use, including a deadly UV knife, but it's hardly worth the monotonous boredom. And good luck finding anyone online to play the multi-player deathmatches. Avoid like garlic!

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Brian De Palma
USA - 1974

Since their inception at the dawn of sound cinema, the Universal Monsters (and their copyright-free counterparts) have been revisited throughout the decades more than any other cinematic miscreants. Numerous Universal sequels, Hammer studio's own distinctly British versions of the characters, Andy Warhol's art house take on *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, contemporary Hollywood remakes of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *The Mummy* (and upcoming versions of *The Wolfman* and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*) plus numerous international appropriations of the characters make for too many offspring to count.

There have, however, only been a few films based on Universal's 1925 silent chiller *The Phantom of the Opera*, which starred Lon Chaney as the title character. One version, originally released to theatres on Halloween night, 1974, is not only a wildly imaginative retelling of Gaston Leroux's original novel, it also set the bar for how a classic horror story could be successfully morphed into a modern-day musical.

With opening narration provided by (an uncredited) Rod Serling, *Phantom of the Paradise* takes audiences on a wild musical ride via main character Winslow Leach, a nerdy but extremely talented musician (played by William Finley: *Night Train*, *The Black Dahlia*). Winslow's music is stolen by Swan (Academy Award-winning singer/songwriter Paul Williams), the powerful owner of Death Records, who has Winslow framed for drug possession and sent to jail. Six months later, Winslow breaks out of prison and attempts to sabotage the record company but is horrifically maimed when his head gets stuck in a ceiling hot record press.

Mutilated and lustful for revenge, he breaks into The Paradise, a rock venue that Swan plans to open with a live concert featuring Winslow's stolen work. But Winslow is captured by Swan and tricked into signing a satanic contract so that his love, a girl named Phoenix (Jessica Harper: *Suspense*), gets to sing the lead role. When Winslow learns that he's been double-crossed again, he decides to kill Swan, even if it means his own death.

Seamlessly intertwined throughout the movie are an eclectic variety of musical numbers including tunes reminiscent of the Beach Boys, mournful ballads sung by the titular phantom himself and even a few heavy rock 'n' roll anthems that would sound perfectly at home coming out of the painted lips of KISS or Alys Cooper.

The film set the template for a variety of horror musicals, notably *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, Tim Burton's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Poultrgeist* and *Repa! The Genetic Opera*.

Writer/director Brian De Palma was a virtual unknown in Hollywood until 1973 when he released *Sisters*, a low-budget psychological thriller starring Margot Kidder. Its success helped him secure the independent backing for *Phantom*, which he shot in ten weeks. It set off a bidding war which culminated in an unprecedented advance of \$2 million from 20th Century Fox.

Initially the film performed poorly at the box office though, as it was marketed towards a rock audience instead of to horror fans. The movie's original posters and playbills featured illustrations of guitars and microphones, and the tagline "He sold his soul for rock 'n' roll." This was accompanied by a series of laughable TV and radio spots narrated by radio DJ Wolfman Jack, who stated, "...it's a horror story, it's a love story, it's a comedy - all rolled into one."

Instead of yanking the film from theatres, though, Fox launched a new advertising campaign the following year, highlighting the horror aspects of the movie. It featured new artwork by legendary Heavy Metal magazine artist Richard Corben, which focused on the lead character's mutilated visage. *Phantom* was re-marketed as "The most highly acclaimed horror fantasy of our time."

It worked, especially in foreign markets (notably Japan and France), proving that horror fans would embrace the genre in this new form. (in Winnipeg, Manitoba it ran in theatres for over a year.)

Throughout the film, De Palma visually references such classics as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Frankenstein*, *Psycho*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Faust*, but it was with *Phantom* that he fine-tuned his own signature point-of-view and split-screen techniques, successfully expressing his recurring theme of corrupt establishments exploiting and manipulating the masses.

Nearly 25 years later, *Phantom's* cult status has continued to grow, despite a bare-bones North American DVD release in 2001. More importantly, it remains a lush, evocative and original film that paved the way for the horror musical as we know it: bold, inventive and full of monsters who are serious mouthpieces.

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